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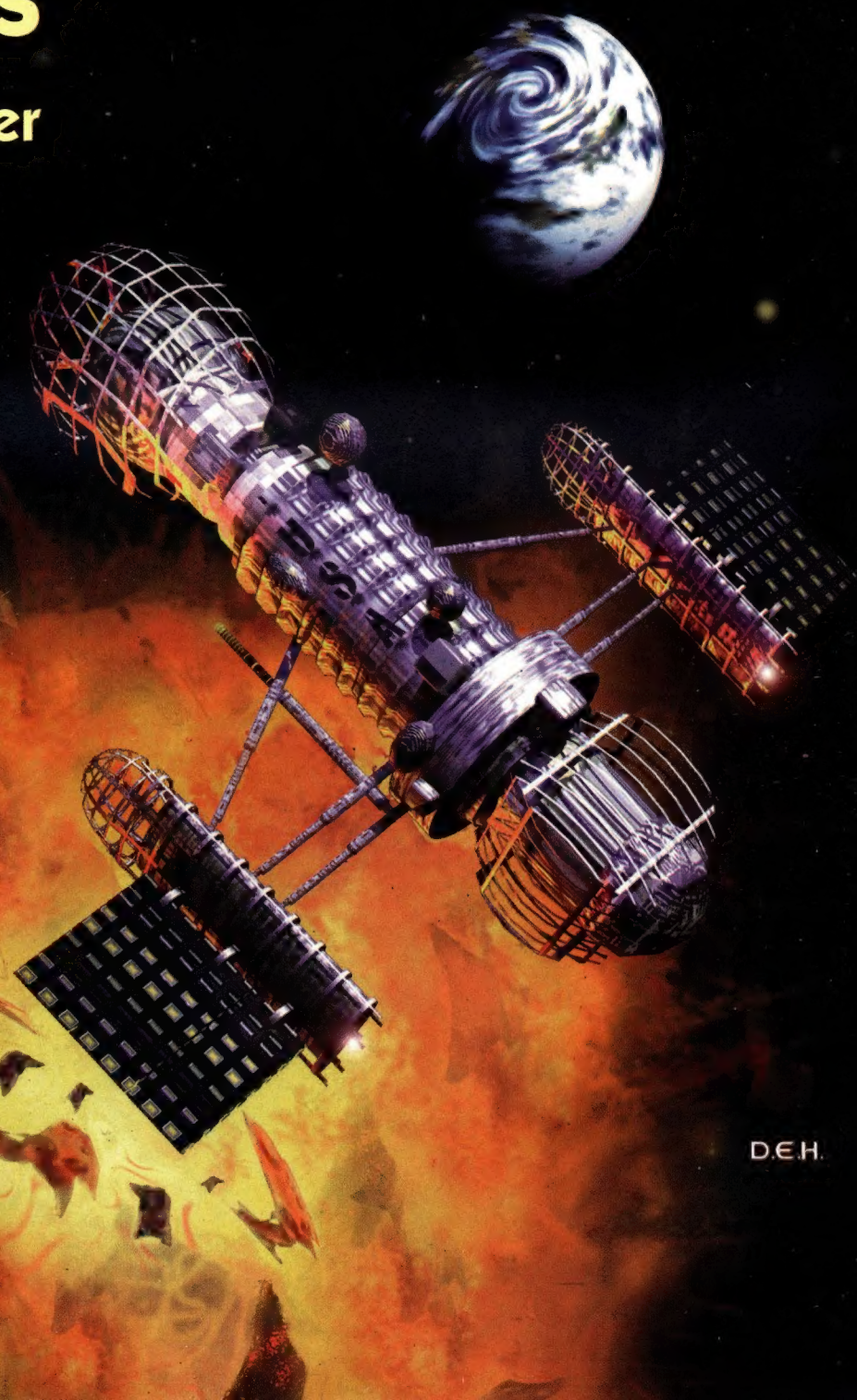
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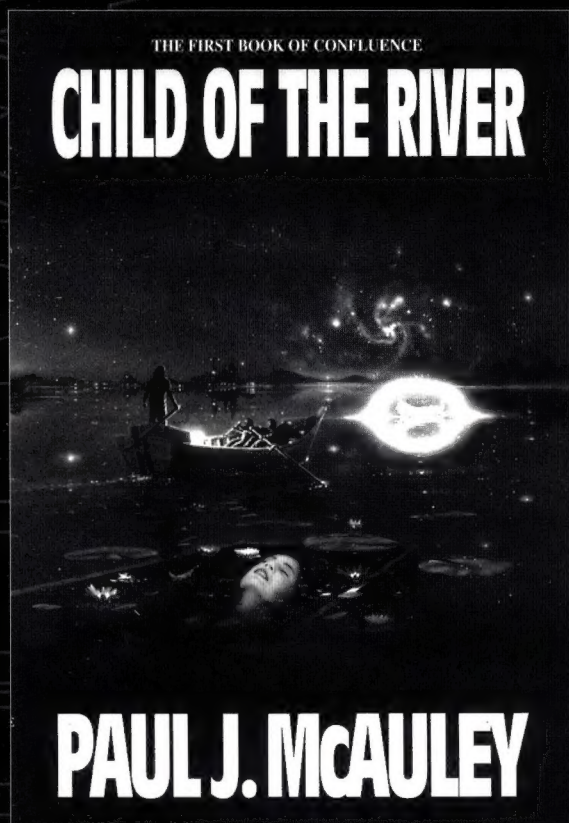
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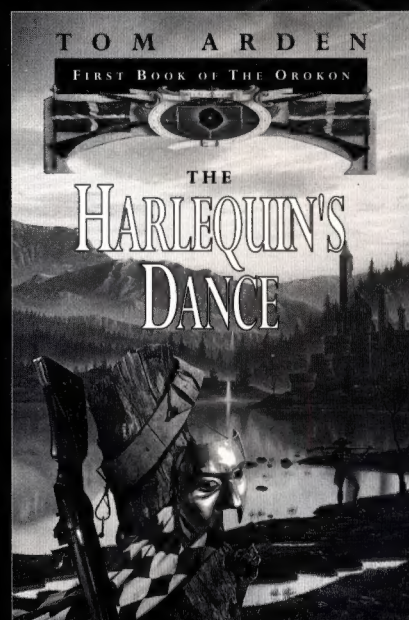
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science fiction & fantasy

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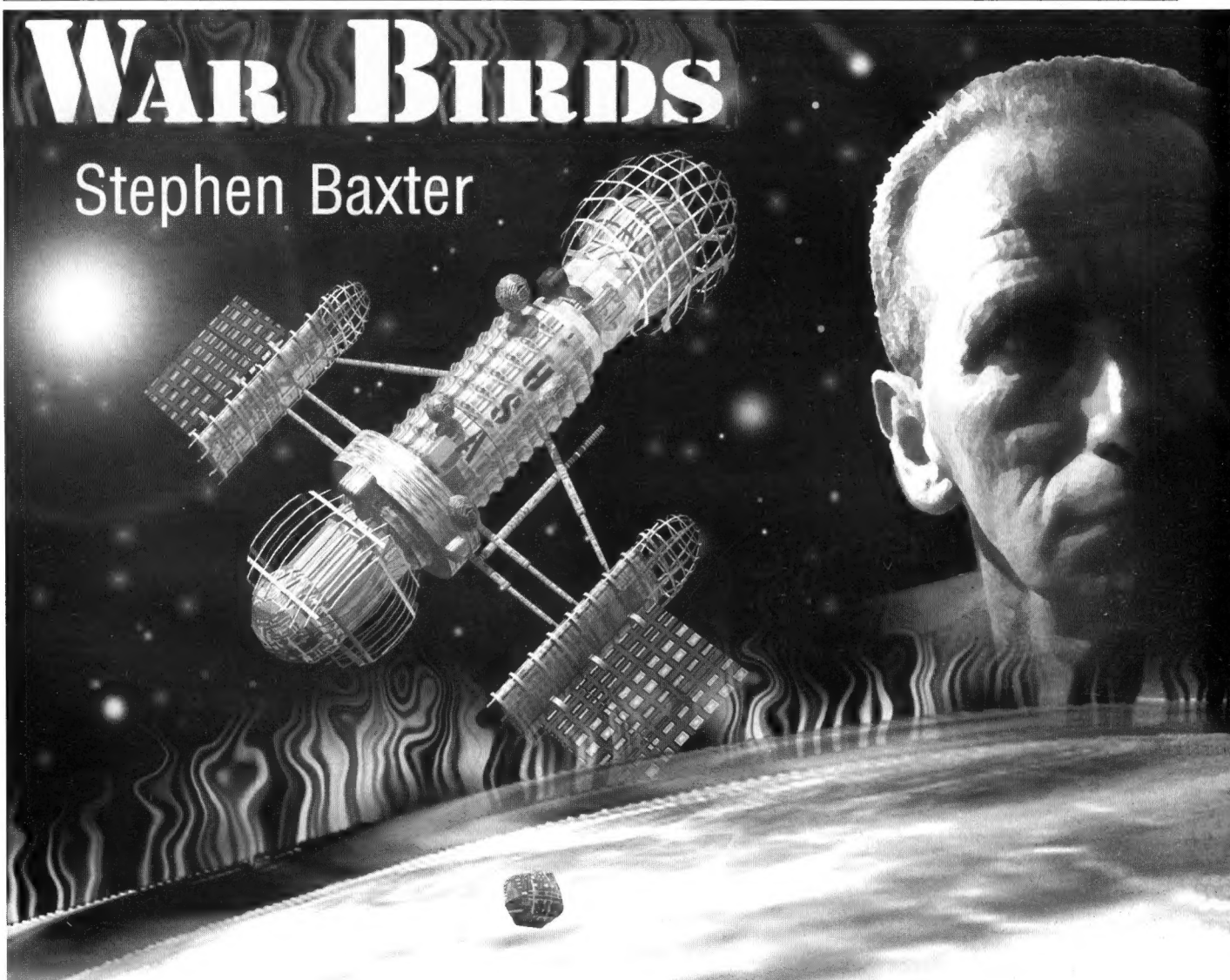
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# WAR BIRDS

Stephen Baxter



November 1969:

The dust of the Moon crunched under Burdick's feet. His footprints, in the low sunlight, under the black sky, were clear and sharp, embedded in billion-year-old regolith.

When Burdick bent and ran his hand through the dirt, it looked a lot darker: almost black, like charcoal. The dirt gave easily for the first couple of inches, but then resisted his gloved fingers.

They'd brought shovels. But it wasn't going to be so easy to dig out graves, here on the Moon.

Here came Harry Singer, his commander, bouncing across the flat, pitted surface of the Sea of Tranquillity. Harry was humming his dumb little country tunes. He had been on a high since that moment when he had brought *Guardian*, still fat on fuel, drifting over this enigmatic ground, and they'd spotted *Eagle* itself, glittering like a toy against the greyness. Burdick understood how he felt. The tough part of the mission was still to come. Let Harry savour the triumph of the landing.

Burdick felt on a high himself. At 39, after eight years in the space programme, he was no longer a rookie. Of course after Apollo 12 was redirected, he wasn't where he'd expected to be, in the Ocean of Storms. And he wasn't going to be doing all the geology and stuff he'd been trained to do. But he'd never made much sense of all the science shit anyhow.

And here he was, after all, on the surface of the Moon itself.

Harry was looking at him. He straightened up. It was time to do his duty.

Side by side, two USAF officers on the surface of the Moon, they faced *Eagle*.

Neil Armstrong's LM was a spidery construct of aluminium sheets and struts, sitting there like a little house. It didn't show many signs of its four-month stay. Maybe the gold insulation blanket on that descent stage was a little pitted. Maybe the colours of the Stars and Stripes painted there had faded a little.

But the four spider legs had collapsed. When it exploded, the boxy heart of the descent stage had just crumpled up and fallen against the dust. The bulbous ascent stage looked intact, but it was tipped over through 30 or 40 degrees, and Burdick could see a split down one seam. *Eagle* sagged like a deflated balloon.

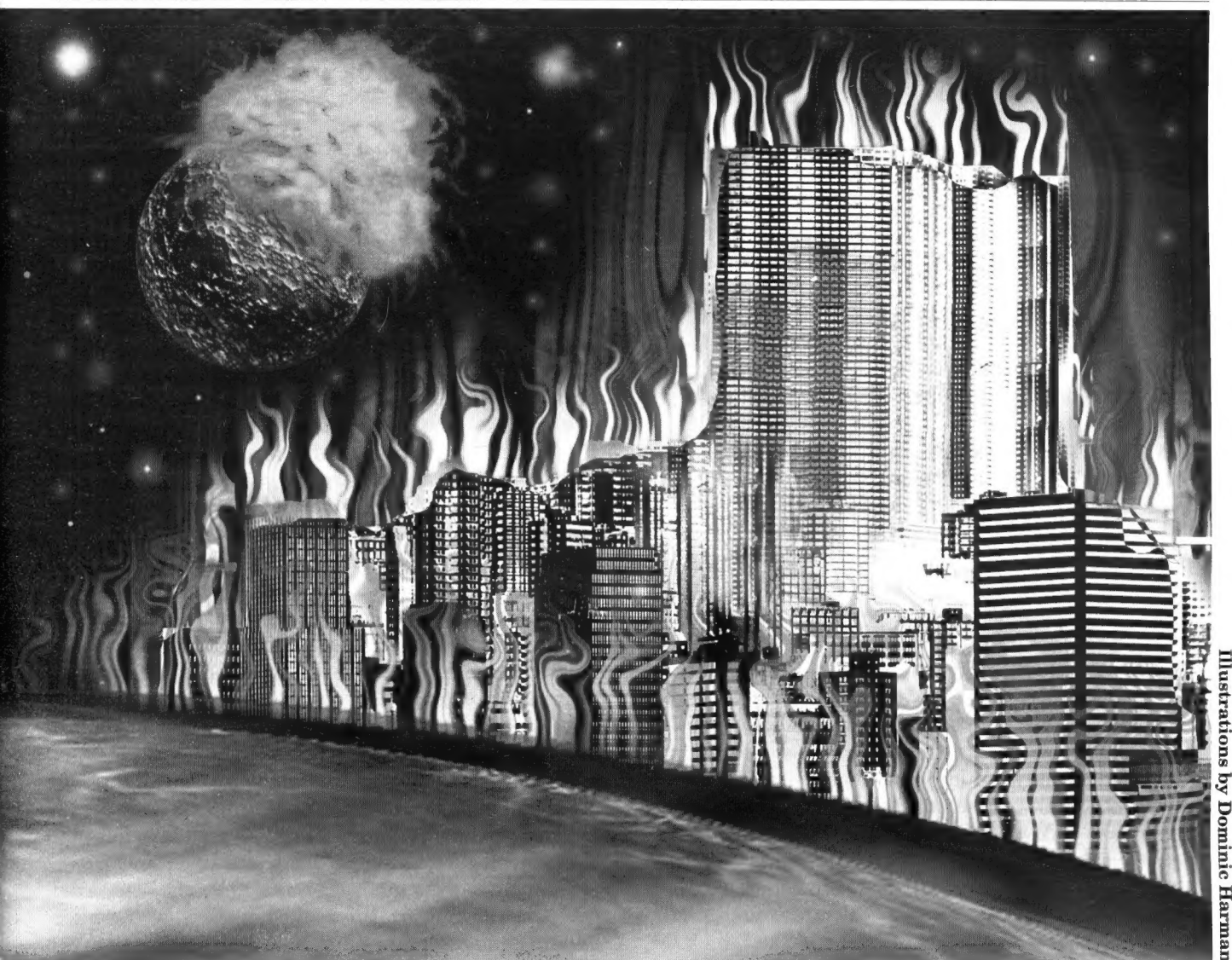
The surface here was littered by bits of twisted-up aluminium hull, and by shards of blown-out insulation blanket, a raying that overlaid the subtler disturbance of the LM's descent engine fire. But there were no footprints here. Nobody had climbed down from this LM. Armstrong and Aldrin had been the first humans to reach another world, and had lived less than a minute to enjoy it.

"Let's get it over," Singer said.

"Yeah..."

Something was glittering, at the edge of Burdick's vision. Something metallic. At first he thought it was





Illustrations by Dominic Harman

some other piece of the *Eagle*, broken off and hurled over the regolith.

But that couldn't be right. It was just too big.

It was the size and shape of a steel bathtub, mounted on six, no, eight spidery wheels. There was an open lid encrusted with what looked like solar cells. A couple of antennae, cones and rods, stuck out of the interior.

*Something moved:* two big camera lenses, fixed to the front of the car, swivelling up to inspect him.

"I don't believe it," Singer said. "It's a fucking Lunokhod." "The Soviets."

"Yeah. Come to see what they did. Come on," said Harry Singer. And he picked up a Moon rock.

Burdick bent, stiff in his pneumatic suit, and got hold of the biggest boulder he could find. It would have been too heavy for him on Earth, probably, and here he could feel its mass, liquidly resistant to motion. Like a miniature Moon itself, the rock was pitted with craters, from a fingertip's width all the way down to fine little pinholes. It was probably billions of years old.

Burdick and Singer stalked across the shining surface, and lifted up their Moon rocks, and began to beat the Lunokhod, smashing away the antennae and the fragile camera assemblies and the sheet of solar cells, their ancient rock weapons splintering in their hands, a quarter of a million miles from home. The sun was bright and in Burdick's eyes, and, under his Snoopy hat, he could feel sweat starting over his brow.

*August 1981:*

*Control, this is Aldrin. Commander's voice check, over. Roger, over. Control, this is the pilot. Voice check, over. Roger, over...*

The sun was bright and in his eyes, and, under his peaked Air Force officer's cap, Burdick could feel sweat starting over his brow.

It was early morning. He was looking east, right into the sun. Beyond the tree line, there was Launch Complex 39, the twin pads loaded up with their Shuttles: 39-B to the left, with *Aldrin*, 39-A to the right, with *Enterprise*. *Enterprise* was due for launch tomorrow, and was still enclosed in its rotating structure, but *Aldrin* was exposed, ready to fire.

He could smell the sea. There were still bands of mist lingering over the flat salt marshes, and he could hear the cry of the gulls wheeling around the gantries.

Burdick was glad to get out of the Kennedy Space Centre executive offices and come up here on the roof to see the launch. As Chief Astronaut it was his duty to show up here rather than in the Firing Room, which would be his inclination. But the astronauts' families were here, and downstairs it was like a kindergarten. The youngest kids had soon got bored waiting for the launch and were crawling around over the floor, playing with orbiter models and mission patches.

He was kind of pleased that his own son, Phil Junior, ten years old, eschewed such games. Today, for instance,



he was off with the Eagle Scouts. It would have been nice to have him up here, Burdick thought, but it was more important to give the little soldier his independence.

This roof was full of VIPs and NASA brass. Here was the new President, Reagan himself, with his first lady, grinning and gladhanding, with Richard Nixon, rehabilitated as Reagan's secretary of state. And there was Curtis LeMay, the old Cold Warrior, brought out of retirement to serve as Air Force chief of staff, following his commander and chomping away on one of his trademark cigars, squat and bustling and competent.

All the civilians were wearing big wide-brimmed hats and sun-block, even Reagan. If you worked here you were supposed to wear filters over your mouth and nose. Some of the pad rats, it was said, had come down with lesions seared into their lungs. But to Burdick that was all bullshit. The ozone layer may or may not have been depleted by all these space launches. And he knew some of the techs were concerned about launching at the height of summer, when all that u-v etched away at the perishables on the orbiter stack. But then those guys beefed about launching in winter too, when ice clustered on the stack and the perishable components, rubber and plastic, got too stiff.

So there was more u-v. So they all had to paint their houses more often these days. So what? What the hell were they supposed to do? Stop launching?

The dominant object in his skyline was the VAB, the Vehicle Assembly Building, a monstrous black-and-white cube, built to assemble Moon ships. The cliff-face wall of the VAB was still scarred by the splash of the petrol bombing, where *Star Trek* fans had broken in to protest at the name of their beloved fantasy spaceship being given to a Shuttle orbiter, a war bird.

There was a big parking lot at the base of the VAB, pretty much deserted today except for the buses which had brought in the press guys. He remembered how different it was in the 1960s, when the lot was always jammed with rows of vehicles, gleaming in the Florida sun like so many metal beetles. But the road traffic had never recovered from the oil price hike that had followed Reagan's nuking of Iran, despite the peace-making efforts of the restored Shah with those Arabs.

As the mist burned off, over on the horizon, he could see the gleaming white of the orbiter, *Aldrin*, against its orange External Tank. He needed his binoculars to see the four solid rocket boosters clustered around the orbiter. This was a stretched Shuttle configuration, designed for heavy lift, 135 tons to low Earth orbit, more than twice the baseline design's capacity. And he knew *Enterprise*, right now, was being fitted with the new liquid fuel boosters, another upgrade path.

Today's launch would be the fourth flight of the four-booster configuration, and the first orbital test of the NERVA 3 nuclear tug. That NERVA was going to be sent around the Moon, unmanned, and then, the plan went, later in the year there would be a couple of manned test flights, and maybe a Moon mission as early as next year. It was all part of the plan to establish a nuclear silo up there on the Moon: more silent sentinels, warning off any possible aggressors.

The NERVA was the reason there were so many VIPs here, on this roof and in the VIP stand.

This would be the 21st Shuttle launch of the year,

from the Cape and Vandenburg, and the 91st of the programme in all, since the first successful orbital flight, bang on schedule in 1977. This year alone there ought to be 44 launches, maybe 15 of them USAF missions, using the Air Force's own two dedicated orbiters launched out of Vandenburg.

The Shuttle had turned into a magnificent success. Everyone had been determined to make it so, NASA, USAF and contractors alike. And Burdick, since he'd transferred from the Moon programme after it was closed down with Apollo 12, had been proud to play his part in that.

There was nothing about the Shuttle programme today that hadn't been in the plans right back in 1969, even before Apollo 11 landed. But *Eagle*, Burdick guessed, had given everyone a little incentive to get it right. Stunt flights to the Moon could wait. Space was the high ground, and if America didn't make it secure, the Soviets would, and there would be hell to pay.

And the Shuttle, with all its military applications – reconnaissance, interception, satellite recovery, hunter-killer capabilities, rescue and relief – was the key.

So here they were, operating five orbiters just as advertised, with an eleven-day airline-style turnaround between each flight, and with the components of Space Station Freedom, an outpost on that high frontier, already being assembled in plants in California and Texas and Alabama.

Anyhow, once old Walter Dornberger, von Braun's old boss, had been brought out of retirement and started applying a little of that old Peenemunde discipline to the project, everything got a lot tighter.

The countdown went through smoothly, as it always did.

Up on the roof, Burdick did his share of the glad-handing and flesh-pressing. But he ducked out once the count neared its conclusion. He was here for the launch, after all.

At main engine start, a bright white light erupted at the base of the orbiter, and white smoke squirted out to either side.

*There they go, guys, three at a hundred.*

Then the four solid boosters lit up, showering orange smoke, yellow sparks. The stack lifted off the ground, startlingly quickly, trailing a column of white smoke which glowed orange within, as if on fire. The plume of yellow light from the SRBs was incredibly bright – dazzling, like liquid light, like sunlight seen from the Moon.

There was clapping and hollering from the dignitaries and crew relatives. Burdick kept his binoculars clamped to his face.

The stack arched over onto its back and followed a steep curve away from its tower. Already the gantry was dwarfed by the smoke column. After ten seconds the Shuttle punched through an isolated thin cloud, threading it like rope.

The sound reached him after 15 seconds: a crackling thunder which came tumbling down over him, sharp slaps over an underlying rumble.

It was a hell of a thing, he thought.

And then –

It looked as if the SRBs had detached a little early. The single vapour trail split up into five, the orbiter itself with its main engines burning white, and the four SRBs careening out of the smoke, like diverging fingers.



Shit, he thought.

The orbiter blew first, that big External Tank on its belly just cracking open, oxygen and hydrogen igniting in a single pure blast. And then the four SRBs went up like firecrackers around that central glare, destroyed by the Range Safety Officer.

*We have no downlink at this time. We're obviously studying the event.*

He could still hear the routine rocket noise flowing over him, like a ghost, the sound of the disaster itself still suspended in the ruptured air.

The NERVA, he thought. How many pounds of fissile uranium had just been smeared over the Florida sky?

Reagan. They had to get the President under cover.

He looked around, through a crowd that had turned into a mob of screaming, crying people. There: Curtis LeMay had his arm around Reagan's shoulders, and was hustling him away, towards the door from the roof. Burdick could hear what LeMay was saying to the ashen President. *We can't tolerate this, sir. We have to consider eradication. I'm talking about Project Control, Mr President. We've been talking about this since the 1950s at the Air War College. We aren't talking about pre-emptive strikes, sir, but about the historic rollback of the Soviet Union. It's time...* Old Nixon was nodding gravely.

Burdick stayed on the roof, a handkerchief on his mouth against the fall-out, until all the women and children had been escorted out of the open air.

*January 1986:*

As the pilots prepared for the interception, Yeager's flight deck was like a little workshop, Burdick thought, glowing with the lights of Earth, and the crews' fluorescent glareshields. The battleship-grey walls were encrusted with switches and instruments that shone white and yellow with internal light, though the surfaces in which they were embedded were battered and scuffed with age and use. There was a constant, high-pitched whir, of environment control pumps and fans.

Once more he had control pedals at his feet, a joystick between his legs. He felt at home. The Shuttle orbiter was a fine old warplane.

The Soyuz target had been over Iraq when Yeager launched from Vandenburg, and there had been a gap of 10,000 miles between them. But orbital mechanics brought him ever closer to his prey, at a rate of a thousand miles per orbit.

Anyhow there was no rush. The Shuttle was fitted with its extended-duration pack, solar panels that had unfolded from the payload bay like wings. They could stay up here for a month if they needed to.

Burdick even had time to send a message down a secure line to Fay at Vandenburg, and to Philip Jr, who was, at 15, a cadet at St John's Military Academy in Wisconsin.

It was good to be back in command.

Since he'd been moved upstairs he was enjoying his assignment as head of the Office of Manned Spaceflight. But flying a desk was no substitute for flying Shuttle. At 56, he'd thought he was too old to fly again, but Hans Mark – NASA Administrator, former Air Force secretary and physicist under Edward Teller – had persuaded him to come out of retirement for this one mission. Space Command needed all the pilots it could get

right now, and even if this mission wasn't the most glamorous of Project Control – those had to be the dramatic high-atmosphere swoops of *Adams* and *Falcon* and *Enterprise*, as they had dropped their bomb loads over the USSR, far out of reach of any intercept capability – cherry-picking the last Soyuz spy ship had to be the most technically challenging, and fun.

The ground track took them over the Soviet Union a couple of times. Even now, a month after Project Control had reached its spectacular climax, he could still see the glowing craters where the space centres at Volgograd and Kapustin Yar used to be. The whole country was pretty dark, although he could see cities burning around the rim of Russia itself: in the Moslem republics of south Asia, and the Baltic republics, and even the east European satellites.

Of course there was a price to pay. Before it collapsed, the Soviet government had shot off a few of its own nukes. Warsaw was gone, for instance. And there were rumours of trouble on the long Chinese frontier. But that was okay by Burdick. Everybody had taken the chance to kick the old bear when he was down, and Burdick guessed they were entitled.

Not that everyone agreed. Before the UN had been thrown out of New York there had been pretty near universal condemnation of the US's actions, universal except for the British anyhow. But the UN were assholes. It was no more than you'd expect from a bullshit factory like that.

When he passed over the US, it was strange to see Florida from orbit, that big black scar down its evacuated eastern coast. Not that the loss of the Cape was so grievous. The *Aldrin* disaster, in the end, had just expedited LeMay's plans to transfer all the Shuttle resources to the USAF. The climate at Vandenburg was a lot more stable for landings anyhow.

Funny thing that the *Aldrin* crash, which had spurred off Project Control in the first place, had turned out to be caused by a simple glitch, a fuel line that had perished from u-v exposure. Not sabotage at all. Burdick didn't suppose it mattered. Control would have come about anyhow. There had been a whole string of provocations from the USSR: Afghanistan, their own unmanned Shuttle, the damn Salyut spy platforms. These things had a huge historic inevitability to them, it seemed to him.

His crew, all USAF officers, was working well, just like the drill. Even young Tom Gibson, up here on his third mission, who had spent half his time throwing up, was working well with the handheld laser ranging device, checking Burdick's position.

Burdick suspected he intimidated these junior guys. They all seemed so damn young. And how must he seem to them? – the only Moonwalker left flying, like some monolith from the past.

The youngsters were all wearing the smart new black uniforms of Space Command, with their thunderbolt flashes and bright logos. The uniforms looked good, and had struck a chord in the public mind, Burdick knew. Air Force Space Command seemed to represent a certain *order*, in a country beset by foes abroad, and trouble at home: revolutionaries everywhere, and polyglot cities, and hippies and anarchists and sex maniacs and drug addicts and activists and homosexuals and punk rockers and soaring crime...



*The Rocket State*, they called it: the goal was a conflict-free society administered from above, dominated by technology and smart young men like these, embodying the eternal American values of piety, hard work, family and flag. Just like the USAF, and NASA.

Order, imposed from space.

And now that Project Control had been implemented, that order would spread across the planet: *Pax Americana*, in the face of which all the old illogical ethnic and religious differences would dissolve, and mankind would come to its senses, and progress to a better tomorrow.

And so on. Burdick accepted it all. It was a fine vision. He'd welcomed the executions of Jane Fonda and Jesse Jackson and John Lennon and the rest of those fellow travellers for their treasonous subversion, the hell with them.

But even so these new uniforms made him feel just a little uncomfortable. They were too close to the images from Germany he'd grown up with as a kid. It was a kind of easy glamour, he thought. He preferred good old Air Force blue.

A couple more burns to tweak his orbit, and then they were closing fast on Soyuz. Burdick went through his terminal initiation burn, and then his rendezvous radar started to track the bogey. He assumed the low-Z position beneath the little Russian ship and used his reaction thrusters to push up towards Soyuz from beneath.

Now he could see Soyuz, through the little rendezvous windows above his head.

The body of Soyuz was a light blue-green, an unexpectedly beautiful, Earthlike colour. Soyuz looked something like a pepperpot, a bug-like shape nine feet across, with its fat Orbital Module stuck on the nose of the main body, a truncated cylinder, capped by the headlight-shaped Descent Module. Two matte-black solar panels jutted from its rounded flanks, like unfolded wings, and a parabolic antenna was held away from the ship, on a light gantry.

Soyuz was basically an Apollo-era craft, still flying 20 years later. It looked, frankly, like a piece of shit to Burdick.

Soyuz was floating right down into Yeager's gaping-open payload bay, like a minnow drifting into the mouth of a shark.

Tom Gibson was working the RMS now, the remote manipulator arm. The RMS had a heavy industrial-strength cutting laser bolted to its end, and Tom just reached up and snipped off the solar-cell wings of Soyuz, snip snip, like cutting the wings off a fly. Those solar panels drifted away, sparkling as they twisted. It was expertly done, and Burdick didn't even need to slow down his rate of approach.

The laser had come out of JPL, which had started producing some fine military applications since its weaponization in 1980.

The crippled Soyuz settled neatly into the payload bay, as if the Shuttle orbiter had been designed for the job. Which, of course, it had.

Burdick got into his EVA suit and, with two of his crew, made his way out through the airlock in back of the flight deck. The big bay doors were gaping open, the silvered Teflon surfaces of their radiator panels gleaming in Earthlight. The bay itself was a complex trench, crammed with equipment, stretching 60 feet ahead of him.

Soyuz sat where it had settled, an ugly insect shape,

cluttering up the bay. The others worked their way around Soyuz, strapping it into position for the glide home. Burdick made his way to the nose of Soyuz, to the complex docking hatch there.

The hatch was already open, the docking probe disassembled. He was, it seemed, expected.

Burdick, alone, pushed his way into the Orbital Module. There were bright floodlights here. He shut the hatch behind him, as he'd been trained, and worked a control panel. He heard a hiss, as air gushed into the module.

The Orbital Module was a ball just big enough for one person to stretch out. It would have been discarded to burn up during the reentry, so it was packed full of garbage: food containers and clothing and equipment wrappers, like a surreal blizzard. This crew had been going home, when their country went up in flames.

When the pressure was restored, Burdick cracked his bubble helmet and took it off. There was a stale smell, and his ears popped as pressure equalized.

The hatch to the Descent Module opened. Burdick drifted through.

The Descent Module cabin was laid out superficially like an old Apollo Command Module, with three lumpy-looking moulded couches set out in a fan formation. Big electronics racks filled up the space beneath the couches.

There was a single cosmonaut here, in an open pressure suit, staring up at him from the centre couch. He was squat, dark, his face as wide as the Moon. He looked to be about Burdick's age.

"*Dabro pazhalavat*," he said. "Welcome. I am Colonel Sergei Kozlov." He held up a little tray, with food. "Bread and salt. A traditional Russian greeting."

"The hell with it."

"Take the damn bread, General Philip Burdick."

Burdick hesitated. Then he floated down, and took the bread. He chewed a little of it. It was heavy, sticky.

"You know my name?"

"*Konyeshna*. Of course. You were a Moonwalker. I saw you approach, on the surface of the Tranquillity Sea."

"Huh?"

"I was teleoperating Lunokhod. I saw you wield your rock. It massed, I hazard, more than you collected as geological samples to bring home."

"We weren't there for fucking geological samples."

"Indeed not. And you are not here for scientific purposes now, are you?"

"Nor you, sir. We know this Soyuz is stuffed full of results from your surveillance activities on the Salyut."

"That is true. But what does it matter? General Burdick, I am the last serving Soviet officer. I have no one to report to."

Burdick discarded his bread. "Colonel, you'll come onto the flight deck, and we'll take you home."

"Home?"

"The United States."

"Will there be TV cameras? Will you parade me?"

"We'll land at Vandenberg. The air base in California."

"*Konyeshna*. Where I aim to apply for political asylum." He grinned. "Does that surprise you, General? But what have I to return to? The radioactive winds which blow across the steppe? Your slow dismantling of my nation?"

"Rebuilding. We'll rebuild your country. We aren't barbarians."

"Thank you," Kozlov said drily. "But it was unnecessary. Don't you see that, General? We were no threat to you. Not really. Nor was Lunokhod. On the Moon, we were only curious, as you were. We were going to change anyway. We had to. We couldn't afford to keep up with you. You could have waited. A little patience." Kozlov smiled. "But I forgive you. Come. I am impatient to see your wonderful Space Shuttle."

Kozlov began to remove his couch restraints.

*September 1993:*

Burdick was impatient to see Phil's Space Shuttle.

Here he was actually cutting his lawn, a real old geezer thing to do, here in the middle of Iowa. Just what he'd always imagined retirement to be, back home in small town America, where he'd started from. Well, hell, he was 63 now, and thanks to the mess space radiation had made of his central nervous system – so the surgeons told him – he looked and felt a lot older. He was entitled to his gentle retirement.

Fay came out with a glass of chilled lemonade, and to remind him that the flight was due overhead.

He cut the mower's engine. Grass clippings sank to the ground, slower than Moondust. He took off his hat and wiped the sunblock off his nose.

He limped to the porch chair. His right leg was pain-ing him again, the one he'd broken a couple of times already. Premature osteoporosis, they said, all that bone calcium leached away in his piss in space, but what the hell.

He sat down, to wait to see Phil.

While he'd been cutting, ruminating, the sun had gone down on him. The first star was out: Venus, undoubtedly, down there on the horizon. There was one hell of an aurora tonight, reaching down from the north. Never used to get auroras in southern Iowa when he was a kid. Something to do with the bombs, the weather girl said.

There was some reading matter on the seat. Here was the speech by Curtis LeMay, venerable Chief of the Air Force, that he'd given to the USAF Association National Convention, out at Albuquerque. It was about his Sunday Punch scheme.

*... and even as we have crushed the heart of Asia, we have to look further ahead.*

*President Reagan's decision to punish China's assault on Space Station Freedom was brave and correct. Let the ruins of the Forbidden City stand forever as a monument to our determination to maintain our grip on the high frontier, space! And yet the Chinese leadership continues to defy us, in every international forum.*

*And meanwhile, the incursion in Turkey of the Arab League under Saddam Hussein is equally unacceptable. Our pre-emptive nuclear assault on Iraq was surgical, necessary and justified. Contrast that with Saddam's recent assault, with Chinese CSS-2 missiles, on our Space Command base at RAF Fylingdales, England, exploiting a dirty and unreliable warhead.*

*We must not allow the warlords of darkened Asia to believe that we can be defied with impunity. Remember, these people are not like us! They are calculating, amoral machines. We must demonstrate our strength of arm and will to them. We have the whole of the future, the whole of infinite space, before us to conquer. But we*





*must act now. We must show we are ready!...*

The word was LeMay had Reagan's ear.

Not that anyone knew how much that meant. Even as the Constitution was being bucked again to allow Reagan to run for a fifth term, the rumours were that Reagan's Alzheimer's was becoming pronounced, and his veep, Nixon, was the real power behind the throne. Burdick didn't suppose it mattered.

The stars were coming out now, pushing through the remnants of the blue blanket of day. It was a good clear night: no rain, a light dew, and the weather girl said there'd be no fall-out threat.

*... I am saying that we have to be prepared! If America is going to survive in this tough old world she has to show that she's prepared to meet any threat, to fight to the last with utter inhibition, whenever she's asked to.*

*Ladies and gentlemen, we won the Cold War with Project Control. Now I'm asking you to endorse our next great task, the demonstration of our will to all of Africa and Asia and Europe: the Sunday Punch...*

LeMay was offering Burdick the chance to return to the Moon. Now, that would be a hell of a thing. Burdick wasn't too old to fly. Such was the demand for experienced astronauts, with more than 60 Shuttle flights a year, there were plenty of creaky veterans older than Burdick still scooting about up there, including his old buddy Harry Singer, for instance, now so racked by calcium depletion – so they said, anyhow – that he couldn't come back down again.

It would be interesting to see the Earth from space again. They sent up Walter Cronkite himself a year ago, when they inaugurated the new Shuttle fleet: fully reusable now, with the DC-10-sized orbiter riding to space on the back of a 747-sized winged booster, just like the first designs back in '69 before the Congressional budget-choppers got ahold of the programme. It had been a hell of a thing to hear that familiar dark brown voice booming down from orbit.

But Cronkite's descriptions of the Earth – the scarred steppes of Asia, the smoking rubble of eastern Europe, even the spreading darkness at the heart of America's own cities – didn't coincide much with his own recollections. Cronkite even claimed to have seen, from orbit, the destruction of Sioux City, Burdick's own home town, by rebelling students and anarchists. It was a little hard to verify such things. The news was pretty heavily censored these days, for valid reasons of national security.

Still, *Pax Americana* somehow hadn't worked out quite the way everyone thought.

Anyhow it was too late for Burdick. His time had come and gone. He was content to watch, now.

And besides –

*Sunday Punch.* That cosmonaut defector he'd brought down from orbit, Sergei Kozlov, sent him long letters about the dangers of the project.

*... You aren't like these others, my friend, these young ones in their un-American uniforms. You must see that some of them actually want it all to end – to pull down the house – to destroy all the little people, dirty and squabbling and unpredictable, who don't understand their giant schemes...*

Hell, Burdick wasn't qualified to judge what Kozlov said. Kozlov was just some Russian who'd grabbed the opportunity to stay in the US, when it came to him,

with both hands. He'd even managed to get his family out before the Chinese invasion and all hell finally broke loose over there.

But Burdick had to admit to a few doubts himself, deep in his gut. There were always unexpected consequences, of whatever you did.

Anyhow here came the Lockheed PowerStar: a brilliant flare of light, like a high-flying plane, climbing steadily over the dome of the sky.

It was time. He called Fay. She came out with more lemonade, and settled down beside him.

The power station was a rectangle of black solar cells, 20 miles long and four wide, with a cluster of Shuttle External Tank hab modules bolted to its spine, as productive as ten nuke plants, so relieving the lack of Mid-East gas that had half-crippled the economy for two decades now.

Pretty soon, it was said, the US wouldn't need the rest of the planet at all.

If Burdick had one regret about his retirement it was that he hadn't got up to orbit to see them putting the plant together, working the beam builders as they extruded their 300-yard lengths of foamed steel. It had made for great TV.

And there was a little firefly spark, climbing up the sky, right alongside the power plant: the orbiter *Eagle II*, commanded by Tom Gibson, carrying Burdick's only son Philip on his first spaceflight. A hell of a thing: two generations of Burdicks, climbing into space.

The rookies seemed to be getting younger every year, to Burdick. Phil Jr was only 22. Well, it was an expansive programme. It ate up crew members.

*Unexpected consequences.*

Sunday Punch was such a damn huge blow, who could say what the consequences would be? Certainly not Burdick.

Not that he admitted as much to Sergei Kozlov, or Fay, or anyone else. He'd learned to keep a lot of his thoughts to himself. It was a lesson he'd learned on the surface of the Moon, in the rubble of Apollo 11. There were some things better left unsaid. Truth was just another weapon anyhow.

He watched as the PowerStar slid down the sky, taking Phil's slowly converging orbiter with it, until it was lost in the deep blue haze on the horizon.

He sipped his lemonade. He could feel dew on his cheeks already. It made his skin-cancer scars itch.

He could always stay out another 90 minutes until Phil came round the Earth again. But it was kind of cold.

Fay had fallen asleep anyhow, her careworn face slack, the shadows on her lined face like pools of black oil.

*September 1997:*

The Florida beach was empty. The sand was hard and flat. A little way inland, there was a row of scrub pines, maybe ten feet tall. The moonlight shadows at their roots were like pools of black oil.

Burdick limped south.

The Moon, to the east, was fat and full, its silver light glimmering off the hide of the Atlantic. To Burdick, here in the grass, the Moon looked like it always had, when it had floated over the Iowa farm of his boyhood, when he'd gone barnstorming over those ash-grey plains with Harry Singer.

But not much longer, he supposed. Not if that old Sunday Punch worked like it was supposed to.

The wind was coming off the ocean. It wasn't cold, but he shivered anyhow, as he thought of the fallout shit it was probably blowing over him, across the sea from Asia. But he was wearing his facemask, and the easterly wind ought to keep the Canaveral crap away from him anyhow.

A flatbed truck had been crudely parked in the dune grass. Burdick could see its tracks, snaking back over the sand. And here were scuff marks where some kind of equipment had been hauled off the back and over the sand, down towards the water.

It looked like Kozlov had been telling the truth about coming down here, whatever he was planning.

Burdick wondered what the hell *he* was doing here, standing in a radioactive sea breeze, on the night of Sunday Punch. But then, he had no place else much to go, not since the Chinese shot down *Columbia II*, with Phil aboard, and Fay had followed him to the grave soon after. The house in Iowa, his lawn, lost its appeal after that, and he started drifting. But there were travel restrictions in place across the country, and after the Guatemalans took out San Antonio, with a nuke on an old Soviet SS-25, you weren't allowed in or out of Texas at all.

Difficult times. Oddly, through his enigmatic, disjointed letters, Kozlov, the old enemy, had come to seem a friend.

Anyhow, here he was.

Singing came drifting up from the water's edge: thick and heavy, like black Russian bread. The voice of an old man. Something going on down there. Somebody moving around, silhouetted by moonlight, a heavy bear of a man hauling tubes and rods and clamps, singing softly, building something.

Equipment was scattered on the young sand. Fat white tubes, pieces of some kind of scaffolding, a little electronic gear. What looked like a small refrigerator, a massive metal box, sitting there in the casting a long Moon shadow.

"Sergei."

The singing stopped. The bear figure straightened up, showing no surprise. "Ah. *Dobry vyechir*."

"The Moon – *luna – eta ochin kraseeva*."

He could see Kozlov's broad, weather-beaten face split into a grin. "Very beautiful. I expected you."

"Yeah." And somehow, Burdick had expected to find just this: Sergei Kozlov building some kind of rocket, here on an American beach.

Burdick took his gun from his pocket. A Saturday night special, point 22. He limped forward, over sand that crunched under his feet.

Kozlov looked at the gun. "Oh, Philip. *Kak zhal*. That such a weapon should lie between us."

"What the hell are you doing here, Sergei? This looks like a rocket."

"It is a rocket. A bath tub rocket. The heart is a block of sugar, encased in this tubing, my central core and strap-on boosters. Nitrous oxide passes down a hollowed centre, for oxidizer. Fibreglass tubes, and sugar for fuel. A fantasy of small-town America. Workshop rockets into space. Not even expensive. And yet this rocket of mine can reach orbit."

Burdick kept the gun up. "Are you crazy? What are you going to do, shoot down the fucking Shuttle?"

Kozlov bent, stiffly, and stroked the white metal box. "The payload," he said. "It is a gene bank. Do you know what that means?"

"No."

"Spores. Dehydrated. Shielded against the radiation of space. This little capsule will last a thousand years, in its high orbit, protecting its fragile cargo. And then it will drift down to Earth. It has a crude but effective heatshield. Oak, actually, as the Chinese use. The capsule is designed to burst open in the air, releasing its microscopic passengers, to scatter on the wind."

"Spores? Why? What's the point?"

Kozlov looked up at the Moon, where black-uniformed Americans, volunteers all, were circling and watching, Tom Gibson and Harry Singer amongst them, waiting for this ultimate demonstration to the world – hell, the Solar System – of American competence and will. Kozlov said, "But didn't your heart lift, as you walked on that ancient landscape?"

"Nothing there but rocks. What use is the Moon, except for this?"

"Undoubtedly, you are correct," Kozlov said sourly. "After Sunday Punch, at last we squabbling Asiatics and Europeans and Africans will throw down our arms, shed our centuries of racial and religious division, and accept your cold logic. How right you were never even to attempt to understand us! Perhaps even your own people will accept that logic, beyond the diminishing minority who are protected by these new black-leather police and soldiers of yours. All human problems will be solved, for all time.

"Of course, you are correct. So shoot me now, Philip, for I am only a foolish old man who might endanger your great project. However –"

"What?"

"You have always known," Kozlov said. "About the *Eagle*. The unfortunate incident which destroyed Armstrong and Aldrin, so long ago. Even we could see the truth, through the grimy lenses of the Lunokhod."

"That there was no bomb."

"No Soviet sabotage." Kozlov worked his shoulders. "A simple malfunction."

"Yeah..."

*The Eagle has landed*, Armstrong had called.

... Burdick had been in the Viewing Area in back of Mission Control, just a rookie, jammed in with astronauts and brass and dignitaries and relatives, looking out over rows of controllers, just young guys, sweating through their shirts. It was only a few seconds after the landing, and the descent engine had just shut down, up there on the Moon, and most everybody was still cheering Armstrong's words.

But Burdick could see something, in the set of the shoulders of TELMU, the Lunar Module controller.

Pressure and temperature were rising in one of the descent stage's fuel lines. There had to be a blockage in there.

"Frozen fuel," Kozlov said. "A slug in a fuel line. Frozen by liquid helium."

"Yeah. We had to stand there and watch while the engine heat approached the slug."

The fuel was unstable. It was supposed to be. And



when that engine heat reached it, that slug would explode like a small grenade.

The phone lines were open, between the control room and the back rooms and Grumman, the manufacturers out at Bethpage. The Grumman people said to launch immediately in the ascent stage, and leave the problem behind. But the Command Module was in the wrong place for a pickup. Maybe they ought to burp the descent engine, at ten per cent power. But they didn't know if the LM was tilted. If its attitude was wrong it might just topple over.

Indecision.

Okay, said Buzz Aldrin, on the Moon. *Okay. It looks like we're venting the oxidizer now.*

That was all.

The vox loops went quiet, and the telemetry on all the screens turned ratty and dropped out, and that was all there was.

"We couldn't exactly conduct a forensic investigation up there, Harry and me," Burdick said. "But –"

"It was just the fuel line. A simple malfunction."

"Yeah."

"It was nothing to do with us." Kozlov smiled. "We were not so smart, as to be able to reach to the Moon to disrupt your plans!"

Burdick shrugged. "The lie was simpler. More useful. We were at war, Sergei. I never had a problem with that."

"I'm sure you didn't. Even though, in a sense, all of this –" he waved a hand vaguely "– is your fault. If only that fuel line blockage had melted, if only Apollo 11 had turned into the dull triumph it was supposed to be. If only you'd told the truth. But you do not see that. You are a good man, my friend, in your own way. You always did your duty. It has left you as a lonely old man on a wrecked world, but you always did your duty. And now I am asking you to perform a higher duty."

"Higher?"

"Help me now. We will build this rocket and fire it off together.

Two old fools, relics of a Space Age. Together in the last of the moonlight. Humour me."

"What do we have to do?"

"Assemble the scaffolding. It is a gantry. You see, we are rebuilding Cape Canaveral, here in the radioactive sands of Florida."

Burdick considered, for long seconds.

He checked his astronaut's Rolex. There were only a couple of minutes to go anyhow.

Burdick picked up tubes of steel, and clamps, and started to figure out how it would all fit together.

They had it half-built when the Sunday Punch went off.

It was a hell of a thing. You could see it, across a quarter of a million miles, the surface of the Mare Imbrium billowing up into space, as the demonstration planet-buster went off beneath it, a quarter of

the Moon's grey old face convulsing in an instant.

Much of the material immediately started to fall back into the new crater, a scar glowing yellow-red, but Burdick could see some of it scattering around the rest of the Moon in a huge raying, pounding over those ancient maria. Some of the material dispersed, already cooling, into space.

"So," Burdick said to Kozlov. "What do you think?"

Kozlov grinned as he hefted a stabilizer fin. "Unexpected consequences. The first rocks will be here in 12 or 13 hours: the big fellows, tumbling into our gravity well, punching through the atmosphere. And a ring will form around the Earth, fat and dense, blocking the sunlight. The temperatures will drop 30, 40 degrees. The ring will hail out slowly, as tektite meteorites. But the ice will last a thousand years. Perhaps a little less, if we are lucky." He shrugged. "Something will survive, of course, in the deep rocks and in the ocean ridges. Our capsule carries eukaryotes, multi-cellular organisms –"

"To start the whole damn thing over again."

"Perhaps they will be lucky: wiser than us, not so wise as you. Come. Help me with this tail section. We have time yet."

The two of them laboured on, assembling their rocket, two old men moving slowly and stiffly around the beach, as the moonlight turned blood red.

**Stephen Baxter, Ph.D.**, was born in 1957 and grew up in Liverpool. His latest novel is *Titan* (HarperCollins/Voyager, 1997) and his preceding book was *Vacuum Diagrams: Stories of the Xeelee Sequence* (much of which first appeared in *Interzone*). His next book has been announced as *Traces* (HarperCollins/Voyager, April 1998) – a fat volume which will collect most of his *other* stories from *IZ* and elsewhere.



Judith Merrill was born in 1923 into an intellectual and Zionist family whose influence, she repeatedly stated, helped to shape her own social concerns. Her first publications reflected a shift towards socialism in being contributions to Trotskyite magazines. During the Second World War she had her first contacts with the Futurians, a group of science-fiction writers including James Blish, Theodore Sturgeon, and Frederik Pohl who she married in 1949. She published her first story, "That Only a Mother," in 1948 and her first novel, *Shadow on the Hearth*, in 1950. Both explore female perspectives on the genetic and domestic consequences of nuclear war. The latter was adapted into a TV movie as *Atomic Attack* which was shown by a number of civil-defence organizations. At that time Merrill was a member of the United World Federalists and a supporter of Gary Davis's World Citizen Movement.

In 1952 she published two collaborative novels written with Cyril Kornbluth under the name Cyril Judd: *Outpost Mars* and *Gunner Cade*. Her first edited anthology was published in 1950, and from 1956 onwards she edited a series of twelve collections under the series title *The Year's Greatest Science-Fiction and Fantasy*. She has paid testimony to the influences on her own thinking exercised by Anthony Boucher and Reginald Bretnor, especially Bretnor's insistence that sf should be grounded in contemporary reality and his refusal to separate sf from realist fiction. Although what she called John W. Campbell's "engineering mind" was clearly out of sympathy with her own, Judith Merrill has nevertheless – like Kornbluth and Pohl – stressed Campbell's receptivity to sociological sf. In one of her most important statements, her 1966 article "What Do You Mean: Science? Fiction?" she put on record her fascination with the sf of the 1960s by writers like Ballard and Disch, which later became lumped together under the heading of the "New Wave." In 1964 Merrill went to Britain to attend the World SF Convention held there, and formed contacts with the writers appearing in *New Worlds* under the editorship of Michael Moorcock. As she states in this interview, she found signs of a new kind of sf although – contrary to legend – she did not coin the phrase "New Wave" and later came to regret its use. She collected samples of this new writing in *England Swings SF* (1968).

Returning to the USA, Merrill grew increasingly uneasy about the American involvement in Vietnam. Witnessing the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago proved to be the last straw and she moved to Canada, in effect renouncing her American citizenship. There she became an active member of CARM,

# One of Postwar SF's Formative Figures

**Judith Merrill**

*interviewed by David Seed*



the Committee to Aid Refugees from Militarism. She later wrote scripts for CBC and acted as a commentator and performer for the TV series *Dr Who*. In 1970 Merrill donated her collection of sf to Toronto Public Library, where it formed the core of the Spaced Out Library, now known officially as the Merrill Collection. This library has since grown and moved to new premises on College Street, Toronto, where it has become one of the major sf archives of North America, housing some 50,000 volumes. In 1985 Judith Merrill edited *Tesseracts*, a pioneering anthology of Canadian sf. Throughout the 1970s she served as an active member of the Canadian organization Hiroshima-Nagasaki Relived which was dedicated to maintaining awareness of the first atom-bombings through petitions, public meetings, and symposia. Merrill maintained a steadfast support for nuclear disarmament through events like the 1984 Temple University conference on "Facing Nuclear Holocaust." She had started writing her autobiography when she died at the beginning of September 1997. This interview was conducted in the Merrill Collection on 23 August 1997, only two weeks before Judith Merrill's death.

*How was it getting into writing science fiction? What was the situation like in the late 1940s?*

I have actually described this in some detail in part of my incomplete memoirs, I mean the more or less final part. It was like most of the other things that happened to me. In general what has happened during most of my writing and editing and other public career is that people have come and said: "It's time to do this. You must do this. Of course you can do this. Please do this now." And then I did it and it worked. So this was pretty much what happened with starting to write science fiction. I had already been through this process with some of the Futurians who were in a position to know why I should be writing pulp stories, and I started writing them and that was fine. I did not think that I was good enough to write sf, and stated that opinion until Ted Sturgeon pounded on my head and said: "Yes you are, yes you can, do it now." So I did it then, and there I was writing sf.

*You have said that some of your first novel, Shadow on the Hearth, got lost?*

Oh, almost everything one wrote in those days got edited barbarously, and I gather *Shadow on the Hearth* was edited because they wanted to sell it to something called the Family Book Club and therefore they didn't want a totally miserable ending. So the ending in which the father who has been making his way back to the family all through the book was shot by the Civil Defence guards in the back alley as a marauder was changed, and he was rescued by the family. Everything came out all right.

*Has there been a restored text that you are happy with for that novel?*

Compact Books in Britain did a version [published 1966] in which I had a chance to do a number of editorial changes. I wasn't able to restore all the stuff that was taken out because I didn't have all the material with me in Britain, but I was able to restore the original ending.

*And what sort of reviews did you get for that novel?*

I got astonishing reviews. There were



a lot of them and there were a lot of mainstream reviews. It was, you must understand, the time when many people including a number of well-known mainstream writers were contributing their atomic horror novels, so there was more accessibility than there might have been a couple of years earlier. Doubleday, who published it, were quite convinced that the book was not going to sell – I was told about it afterwards – and they didn't expect any particular review notice. The day that the book came out I was home. I had a new baby at the time, and I was home being a mother. Nothing had been planned in the way of a launch or anything of the sort and then a friend phoned me and said, "what do you think about the review in *The Times*?" and I said "the what?" Doubleday apparently had not known that there was going to be a daily review in *The Times*.

*That was the New York Times, was it?*

In the *New York Times*, yeah, and the daily column was devoted to this book. The columnist, whose name I have now forgotten (but he was quite well known), said I wasn't H. G. Wells and I wasn't Jules Verne and I wasn't Aldous Huxley (he mentioned three or four others) but it wasn't a bad book. This was like, I can't say what a benefice this was in that era. It was incredible. And then there were reviews right round the States in small and large journals as well as, of course, the science-fiction magazines. Most of the others thought maybe I was H. G. Wells, though, or Aldous Huxley or somebody. But I was astonished. Doubleday was even more astonished. They maybe even regretted pulling the book apart to sell it to the Family Book Club: I don't know, they never admitted it. But it was the right book at the right time.

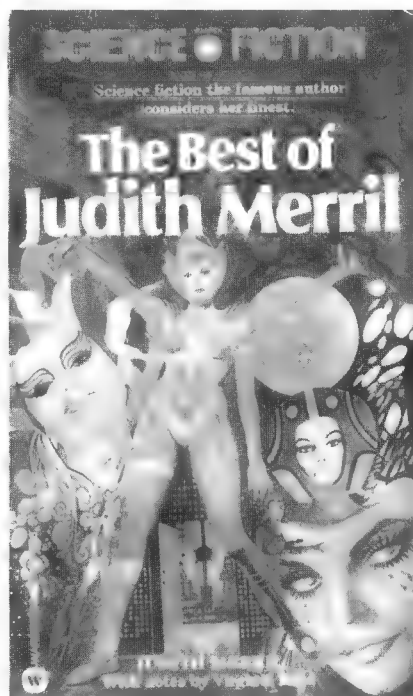
*And at that time I guess there were very few women writing science fiction.*

Compared to now there were few, yes. There were women writing science fiction long before me, however.

*What about the collaborative novels that you wrote with Cyril Kornbluth? How did those come about?*

It had started with an idea that Fred Pohl, to whom I was then married, had for a novel. It was a nice idea about this lethal gene mutation, which Fred had previously tried doing. It hadn't worked, so he sort of gave it to me. I started writing it. I was pretty excited about what I had. Then I got pregnant with this baby I had when my first novel came out. I mean, the baby was born, there were these diapers I was washing and I just went stupid and turned total cow, and I put the book aside and

thought "OK, I'll do it afterwards." Very shortly after the baby was born, Cyril Kornbluth, who was an old friend of Fred's and whom I had not previously met, came to visit us. Cyril was living in Chicago and we were in New York. I dug out this 20,000 words that I had written. Cyril looked at it, he got excited about it and he said, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "I don't know yet." And he said, "Well, how do you feel about me taking a stab at it?" So I said, "fine." Cyril locked himself up in a room for three days and came out with 40,000 words. I read it and I thought it was great. At that time Cyril had a full-time job for a wire service in Chicago and he had to go back to work; he was on holiday.



So he left it with me and I started working on it. I re-wrote what he did. He had completely re-written, I completely re-wrote. And then we kept mailing it back and forth, and after a little while we had a novel. Like all these other things, it was like somebody came to me and said, "How about we do this, or how about you do this?" – and it worked.

The second novel, *Gunner Cade*, was quite a different matter. Cyril by that time had been selling enough. The first novel, the Mars one, had sold immediately when it was finished and Cyril had been selling a lot of stuff of his own, so that he wound up quitting the wire service. Fred and I had just bought a really big house in New Jersey, and Cyril and his wife were coming to stay with us while Cyril was going to start writing full-time. At the time that they arrived his wife Mary had been told that she had to stay flat on her back for the rest of a pregnancy which was only a few months along if she wanted to get the baby. They'd been

trying to get a baby for years, and they hadn't managed. I was recovering from an abortion and haemorrhaging in bed as well. Mary was in bed in one room, I was in bed in the other, Cyril was dashing back and forth. He had an idea for a novel totally outlined that he had never actually written. So I was reading his outline, and we talked about it and we did a new outline. Our situation was so drastic all around: Mary flat on her back, Fred and I having all kinds of emotional problems. Fred was spending most of his time in New York working in the agency he was running for another old friend who was dying slowly in hospital. I didn't see much of him at the house. I had a nine-year-old daughter and a one-year-old daughter. And we were all flat broke. So Cyril and I worked out an outline with the intention of writing this novel in three weeks.

We were not trying to write any great piece of work. We were trying to write a good saleable novel. In doing the outline we borrowed liberally from three or four different authors favoured by John W. Campbell. We did some sharp analysis of what Campbell liked to buy, worked out alternate sections for Cyril to write, me to write, with the notion that the two of us, once I was back on my feet which was not long, the two of us would keep house and alternate nights, one or the other of us would stay up and write. So one section would get finished each night. It took us in fact six weeks instead of three. This was largely because it turned out that we were doing the same thing that we did the first time. Each of us was re-writing totally each time. Cyril was a minimalist: his first drafts were half the length of his final drafts. I was the other way: my first drafts were twice the length of my final drafts. So with these 5,000-word sections that we had mapped out, Cyril would write 3,000 words, I would write 8,000 words. The next night I would expand his or he would cut mine down and write the next section; and it went on this way.

So in the end it took quite different processes with both books. With a few exceptions at certain spots, in general we couldn't say who wrote what. Everything had been written by both of us. The battle scenes in *Gunner Cade* Cyril wrote, the love scenes I wrote. Other than that we really didn't know. *Gunner Cade* sold immediately to John Campbell, and Cyril and I sent a telegram to Fritz Leiber saying, "Congratulations, *Gather, Darkness!* has sold again." We were both very conscious of the extent to which we had... not plagiarized, but commercialized. *Mars Child* [also known as *Outpost Mars*], which was a novel both of us respected and liked, vanished from public ken almost immediately. *Gun-*

ner Cade has never been out of print. It's always been in print somewhere, which I guess proves that bad books drive out good.

*Moving forward from this, how important did you find the British New Worlds magazine and that group?*

Very important to me.

*Was that the first time you'd encountered J. G. Ballard's work?*

No. I had been reading Ballard – well, *New Worlds* was the place I encountered Ballard's work, but that was from before Michael Moorcock's time, from before my arrival in England. What I found in the new *New Worlds* (I've been thinking about this since we first discussed this interview and I suppose it's part of the reason why I really wanted to do the interview because "New Wave" is a phrase which I never ever used except to deny that I had used it), what excited me about it, was what first excited me about science fiction. It's no different: it was the process of reading stuff that made me think new things that I hadn't thought before. It wasn't a matter of being given new ideas; it wasn't a matter of finding this person's thinking exciting, I mean that often happened. But that was not what excited me about science fiction, it was not what excited me about *New Worlds*. It was the match being put to my own imagination. I would start to have new ideas as a result of reading a particular piece of work. At the time Moorcock started doing all the stuff he did with *New Worlds*, by the time I arrived in England and entered that scene, I was no longer the novice sf reader I had been when I first encountered this experience reading Leiber and Sprague de Camp and Heinlein. I was more sophisticated, they were more sophisticated, but for some time before all this began to happen one had got a certain fatigue (as I have felt in recent years) because, although sf was in one sense improving, and the literary quality was rising, the more that attention was being paid to rhetoric the more it seemed as if ideas were being rehashed. And I wasn't getting my fix, not new idea-fix but new *experience* of idea-fix.

So all of a sudden there was this *New Worlds* stuff. Now, what had become important to me by that time was what I thought of as "matrix thinking." Delany was using the word "multiplex," and other people were using other ways of describing it, but the significant thing to me was that it was not old-fashioned logic or straight linear thinking but something holistic. What I found happening as I watched the development in Europe was that more and more of the writers who were involved there

were making an attempt to use language and story-structure in ways that could convey matrix thinking, holistic thinking rather than beginning-middle-end plotting at a pulp level. This was what got me excited. This was what had a whole bunch of maybe 20 authors at the time excited and doing what they were doing. It's what drove most of the reigning dinosaurs in American sf absolutely frantic because they couldn't find where the beginning, middle and end were.

*These new writers were Delany, Ballard...?*

I hate listing names because I always leave out half of them. Go back and look at all the work that was being published in *New Worlds* during the first years that Moorcock did it, and there are all your names. Tom Disch, Aldiss at the time with *Barefoot in*

simultaneously in New York and in Washington DC, maybe in London as well. Every sf writer who lived within 150 miles' radius of these cities was invited to these previews. There was this massive sf audience at the New York preview which I attended. Now, that version of the film was quite different from the one they are now screening. It was 40 minutes longer; a large part of that 40 minutes was in the opening sequence before a word is spoken, and a sizeable chunk – maybe four or five minutes, which is a lot in this situation – was in the jogging scene on the spaceship where the guy is jogging round and round and round in the same area. I find it difficult at this remove to talk about what that long silent section contributed, but it was a lot. I remember specifically what happened with that structure. They ended the giant scene with a guy coming through the centre shaft and making a right-angle turn onto the deck from the shaft. First thing that happened with the longer scene was that after about the sixth or seventh time around the track you got right this life in a spaceship – *boring*. And this settled in: you realized that what you could do in a spaceship was so limited, and the space was so limited, that most of the time would be just that boring. By the end of that section everybody had started shifting around in their seats and rustling and so forth. This guy comes up through the centre shaft, makes his turn, and everybody in the theatre knew immediately – everybody had acquired the orientation from watching the jogging as the viewpoint changed – so that when the guy came up out of the shaft you knew immediately he'd hit a certain level of gravity and his head would now be oriented in this way. You knew how it worked. You not only knew how boring life in a spaceship was, you knew the geometry of life in a spaceship.

So, anyhow, they got persuaded to cut these drastically, and part of the reason they got persuaded was the audience reaction. The sf writers as well as the journalists, as well as whatever general audience was there – it was an enormous theatre. In the very last scene, when you see the baby, I was standing on my seat to see the screen because everybody around me was getting up, putting their coats on. About a quarter of the audience had left during the intermission, which occurred in the discussion about HAL in the pod, but those who remained were just desperate to get out of the theatre. They'd had it. During the intermission sf writers gathered at the lobby, Lester del Rey as leader, and every writer there – with the exception of Delany, Hans Stefan Santesson (whose name you may not even know) and myself – every other one I

concluded on page 26



*his Head*, Langdon Jones, Josephine Saxton....

*And you felt these were changing the structure of science fiction?*

No, they weren't at all. They were writing stuff that was more exciting to me than the sf that had stopped being exciting to me. In fact, they did change the structure of science fiction but the resistance to it was so strong that I didn't know whether they were going to have an impact on it or not, and it was not the structure of sf that I was concerned about. It was the kicks I was getting – *me* personally – out of what they were doing.

*Where do you think the resistance was coming from?*

Well, I'll tell you a story designed to show you how massive the resistance was. When the movie *2001* came out there was a large press preview held



# The Case of Jack *the* Clipper or

## A Fimbulwinter's Tale

David Langford

LIFE IS FILLED WITH BODINGS AND PORTENTS. WHEN I encountered my old acquaintance Smythe in the High Street I sensed that my own life was about to take some strange new turning... specifically, into the King's Head lounge bar, where with old-fashioned courtesy the renowned specialist in the uncanny reminded me that it was my shout.

"Cheers," I said a minute later, as we sat and sipped our bitter.

"*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn*," he responded eruditely; these occultists know many unfamiliar toasts. "I have just been picking up my new business cards – here, allow me to present you with one."

I studied the ornately engraved slip of pasteboard. *Dagon Smythe, Psychic Investigator*. "I can only admire the Seal of Solomon hologram... but, *Dagon Smythe*?"

"It is often advantageous, in this hazardous line of work, to have been prudent in one's choice of godparents. But stay! As a trained observer, I see that you have torn the sleeve of your jacket, probably on a protruding nail. I am reminded..."

"Is *that* the time?" I cried with the spontaneity that comes of long practice. "Well, I really must –"

"I am reminded," said Smythe inexorably, placing a gentle but firm hand on my forearm, "of a certain rather curious investigation in which nails played an interesting role. Nails, and old gods, and the end of the world."

"Why, yes! I remember that case well. One of your finest. The crooked occult-supplies house that used scanning tunnelling microscope technology to dismantle a nail from the True Cross into its individual atoms, enabling them to flood the market with countless billions of genuine if very tiny talismans and..."

"A different case, my friend, and a different kind of nail. This was some years ago in the small old town of F—, which lies close to D— in the county of B—. It was there that I investigated a weird reign of nightly terror. You must imagine the town's twisty streets swirling with late autumn fogs, so that every passer-by appeared as an eerie, phantasmal silhouette. And any one of those shadows in the night might be the creature that had earned the nickname... Jack the Clipper."

"Ripper?" I enquired.

"Clipper. For, time and again, the men (never the women) of that accursed town would report dim memories of a particularly strange shape that loomed through icy fog. A shape with a hint of flickering flame about it, no sooner perceived than lost in a mysterious tumble into unconsciousness. Then, seconds or minutes afterwards, the victim would find himself sprawled on the chilly stone of the pavement, his shoes and socks mysteriously removed in that interlude of missing time, and – sinister and eldritch beyond all imagining – *his toenails neatly clipped*."

At this point, being caught in mid-gulp, I suffered a regrettable accident with my pint of bitter.

"You laugh, do you? You laugh?"

"Some of the beer went the wrong way," I lied, shaking my head determinedly.

"Shallow and innocent person that you are, ignorant of all occult implication, you laughed. It is not so funny when you recollect that nail-clippings – the *exuviae* coveted by witches – play an important part in rituals of binding, of magical domination. And this elusive Jack the Clipper had struck again and again, night after night, amassing these means of sorcerously controlling what might ultimately prove to be the entire male population of the town of F—." He shuddered dramatically. "The hidden hand that wielded such control had the potential for unleashing very great evil indeed, up to and including a by-election victory for the Conservative Party. No... this was indeed no laughing matter."

I nodded dutifully. "And, er, this kind of voodoo control with sympathetic magic and waxen dolls and toenails, this was indeed the secret behind what was happening?"

"Oddly enough, it was not." Smythe drained his glass and placed it meaningfully on the table. I did the same, a trifle more meaningfully. There was a short pause.

Abruptly he continued: "You will remember my fervent belief in the value of applying the full range of modern technology to problems of occult investigation. I pioneered the Laser Pentacle, which outdid dear old Carnacki's electric version by vaporizing the more susceptible ab-human manifestations even as they attempted to pass through the wards. It was I who designed what has become the standard electronic probe for registering demonic presences, the Baphometer. Now the town of F— offered an opportunity to field-test my experimental, computerized zombie spotter."

"Pardon?" Sometimes my friend's uncanny intuitive leaps eluded me.

"This mechanism was inspired by what students of artificial intelligence call the Eliza Effect... a shorthand for a kind of mental blindness which most human minds share. ELIZA is a rudimentary computer program

which tries to imitate a psychotherapist – you type in something like ‘WOULD YOU LIKE A DRINK?’ –”

“Yes please,” I said, quick as a flash; and quick as a flash, Smythe ignored me.

“– and the ELIZA program might come back with ‘WHY DO YOU THINK I WOULD LIKE A DRINK?’, or throw in some random question like ‘WHAT MAKES YOU SAY THAT?’ or ‘INPUT ERROR \$FF0021 REDO FROM START?’ All very *mechanical* and uncreative. But such is the power of wishful thinking – the Eliza Effect – that it’s incredibly easy to fall into the belief that the program’s responses come from some real intelligence.”

“From some real intelligence,” I repeated intelligently.

“This, of course, is how zombies routinely pass in modern society: they have no more true conversation than ELIZA, but our natural, human weakness is to give them the benefit of the doubt. My zombie spotter, though, is a pocket computer with a speech-recognition facility. It lacks any power of wishful thinking. It analyses conversations with cold logic, and reports when the responses are sufficiently simple, repetitious and content-free – as is the case with zombies, and with minds whose free will has been overlaid by some form of malign poppetry, voodoo, or other sorcerous control. With this device –”

Here Smythe seemed to remember something, and mumbled briefly in what I took to be Gaelic. I felt suddenly impelled to carry the empty beer-glasses to the bar, order two fresh pints of Ticklepenny’s Old Ichorous, and bring them to our table.

“With this device in my pocket,” Smythe went on after several grateful sips, “I sampled the population of F—, entering into numerous conversations in the local public houses, identifying victims of Jack the Clipper, and surreptitiously assessing the speakers’ Zombie Quotient.”

“You bought drinks for ‘numerous’ people!?” I said, aghast. Smythe’s parsimony was famous in our little circle of friends.

“Er...” The eminent occultist looked momentarily embarrassed. “Actually I used an old Irish charm I’d learned in my travels – a tiny *geas* that compels the hearer to acts of senseless generosity. It’s quite harmless, although it does slightly lower the intelligence of the subject.”

I didn’t quite follow this odd explanation, and after puzzling over it for a few moments I indicated that Smythe should continue his fascinating narrative.

“On the whole, my zombie scan simply drew a blank. Of course there were a few significant ZQ readings from individuals whose higher brain functions had been depressed by excess alcohol, extreme fatigue or compulsive perusal of *The Sun*. But there was just no sign of the widespread occult control which I’d feared.”

“Oh, bad luck. One of your rare failures, then.”

“Failure? Am I not a scientific investigator? Was I to be discouraged by the slaying of my initial hypothesis by ugly fact? Never! However, I confess that I found myself momentarily at a loss; and so I determined to seek a new line of attack by the traditional means of haruspication.”

I pondered that word. “What, cutting out someone’s entrails? Did you call for volunteers, or something? Intrepid investigator needs men with guts.”

“Tut, tut. Haruspication is the *examination* of entrails for hints of things to come. The definition says nothing about cutting them out. That was merely an unfortunate necessity imposed on the ancients by lack of appropriate technology. As you say, I called for an amply paunched volunteer, a recent victim of Jack the Clipper. The rest was merely a matter of a little influence and a little bribery at a convenient hospital which possessed...” he paused dramatically... “an ultrasound scanner.”

“Excellent!” I cried.

“Elementary,” said he. “Interpreting the convolutions of intestines which are quivering and peristalsing in real time is something of a specialist craft, I must remark, but well worth anyone’s study. Long and hard I gazed into the ultrasound scan display, as one delusive word after another took shape in those loops and coils. And this –” he turned over the business card still lying on the table, and scribbled on its back – “*this* is the word that I finally read there.”

I took up the card. “*Naglfar*?... You’re quite sure it isn’t a misprint?”

“That one word, my friend, should have told you the whole story, had you been the ideal reasoner which, in fact, I am.”

“It’s an anagram of ‘flagrant’? Well, nearly.”

“It was sufficient, when I had thought things through, to persuade me to make a few unusual purchases: scuba gear, cylinders of oxygen and Halon 1301, the makings of a protective pentacle, and a small pair of toenail clippers.

“Picture me now, that night in my room at the town’s one hotel, the Marquis of G—. I stood at the centre of an improvised defence pentacle which, for a particular reason, was picked out in ice cubes. I nervously checked the oxygen flow in the scuba rig, I struck a small flame from my cigarette lighter, and I cast my clipped toenails out across the psychic defences with the trembling words, ‘An offering to you, oh Loki!’

“And, as I had hardly dared to hope, the god Loki appeared, emerging somehow from the fiery interior of the central heating pipes. Being a trickster deity, he had adopted the aspect of a used car salesman, but with hot flame flickering in his eyes. His questioning gaze seemed to burn through my skin.

“‘I read the clues,’ I said, ‘Jack the Clipper preys on men and never on women, and as the world’s foremost occult investigator I know my Norse myths. The *Naglfar* is the ship made of men’s nails which you are fated to steer through the sea that rises to engulf the land when all Earth is destroyed in the final days of Ragnarok. Of course you chose toenails rather than fingernails, owing to their superior quality as a maritime construction material. But I’ve no idea why you should collect the wherewithal to build that dread vessel in a dull town like this.’

“‘Trickster gods are allowed to be as silly and capricious as they like,’ Loki explained, stepping forward: ‘And of course I picked an obscure place where Odin wouldn’t think to look.’ The words emerged in individual goutts of flame, reminiscent of a circus fire-eater with hiccups. ‘Ouch. By Niflheim!’ Being also a fire god, my visitor did not relish the ice pentacle... but nevertheless slowly forced his way through my wards in a cloud of hissing steam. His nostrils literally flared. ‘I should add that fire gods have this regrettable habit of slowly incin-



For the first time since I'd known him, Smythe looked nonplussed.

**David Langford** writes the “Ansible Link” gossip column in each issue of *Interzone*. He lives in Reading, Berkshire, and his previous stories for this magazine were “Blit” (#25), “A Snapshot Album” (#43), “Encounter of Another Kind” (#54), “Blossoms That Coil and Decay” (#57), “The Net of Babel” (#92) and “The Spear of the Sun” (#112). The last-named story was taken for reprinting both in *Asimov’s SF* magazine and in a best-of-the-year anthology edited by David Hartwell.

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interzone

Mackendrick stepped from the patio of his villa and took the zigzag path down the hillside. He paused at the first bend to rest and admire the view. For almost 30 standard years – half his lifetime – he had lived on Shannon's Break, the second planet of Antares; for ten of those years he had served as Planetary Overseer, but all the responsibilities and politics of that post were far behind him now.

He lodged a boot on a twisted, upthrust root and stared down the mountainside. A thousand tributaries tipped perfect waterfalls from the continental plateau onto the rainforested delta far below. Mackendrick never failed to feel a visceral thrill at the view. The great crimson hemisphere of Antares hung majestically over the oceanic horizon, its swollen mass giving off geysering gouts of fire in slow-motion whorls and curlicues.

Mackendrick took this walk every afternoon, a bag of scraps clipped to his belt to feed to the flying fish which congregated in the lagoon at the foot of the path. He had settled into such routines very early in his retirement: the habit-bound structure he imposed on his days helped him keep going, and helped him to forget.

One such habit was that he still wore his commset on his wrist, even though his self-imposed exile was only rarely broken these days.

Today, however, was one of those rare occasions. A shrill double note interrupted his absorption in the alien landscape.

His heart raced. He had been half-expecting a call. Half-dreading it. His son, Philip, had been back on Shannon's Break for two standard months – it was only a matter of time before he made contact, Mackendrick felt sure.

"Okay, commset," he said. "I'll take the call."

The tenuous figure of a man took form a short distance before Mackendrick on the path. He was short and dark, with beak-like nose and a hunched posture.

Mackendrick relaxed. "Bron," he said. "It's been too long." Serge Bronowski had been Mackendrick's personal assistant for the last four years of his tenure as Overseer. He was a quiet and conscientious man, the type who had inevitably been overlooked when it came to appointing Mackendrick's replacement.

"Ah... sorry to bother you, Mr Mackendrick." Even after all this time, Bron refused to use his first name.

"What is it, Bron?" asked Mackendrick. Bron looked troubled. This clearly wasn't just some errand for Meg Bailey, the new Overseer.

"There's been an incident, Mr Mackendrick. Twenty kays inland."

Beyond the human reservation, then. Mackendrick fought the irresistible tug of his memories, the physical sickness he felt at any mention of such "incidents."

He shook his head. "I'm not the Overseer any more," he said. "It's not my responsibility. Why aren't you telling Meg Bailey all this?"

Bron stared studiously at the ground as he replied. "The incident is a serious one, Mr Mackendrick," he said. "It involves the Xenobiological Survey. It –"

"Philip? It's Philip, isn't it?" Philip had been staying with the Survey since he had come back to Shannon's Break to work on a post-doctoral research project.

Bronowski looked up. "I can pick you up in 15 minutes," he said. "I think we should go as soon as possible."

# Under Antares

*Keith Brooke & Eric Brown*

They were five or six kays beyond the southern perimeter of the human reservation when Mackendrick saw the first of the fliers.

Bronowski piloted the aircar in studious silence and Mackendrick stared out of his side screen as they flew over the scrubby savannah of the plateau. Scattered herds of landcrabs grazed amongst the sparse trees, looking like clusters of boulders with twitching, periscopic antennae.

To the east, the ruddy hemisphere of the sun seemed to fill the sky. At this time of year it was a constant feature – save for a few hours around the middle of the nominal night – and he felt he should be accustomed to the sight of it. But Antares was like his guilt: though it might rise and fall to varying degrees, it was never far from the surface.

After a time, his attention was drawn to a number of small, dark flecks against the crimson canvas of the sun. At first he was unsure whether they were real or merely a visual trick caused by staring at the sun. Then he thought they must be birds – perhaps nighthawks, although he knew they rarely strayed this far north.

Then he saw, with a sudden shock of recognition, first one creature close by, and then dozens, and thereafter perhaps a hundred or more of the intelligent, winged beings. Within seconds, they had closed in around the aircar, an aerial escort for the last few kays of the journey into the interior.

Mackendrick had not seen a Shandikar in the six years since he had retired as Overseer. He had not wanted to – they stirred too many bitter memories, revived too much pain.

The Shands were an ancient race. According to xenarchaeologists they had been an advanced technological civilization long before humankind had come down from the trees. But that phase was far behind them now: for many thousands of years they had lived as hunter-gatherers, bound into a sustainable and peaceful existence by primitive spiritual beliefs based on ancestor worship. The apparent simplicity of their existence had, in the early days of human settlement on Shannon's Break, led to many misunderstandings. Shandikar society was governed by a complex code of rites and laws which humans interfered with at their own – very substantial – risk.

Such misunderstandings had become less frequent



over the years but, as Overseer, Mackendrick had been involved in arbitration over numerous transgressions. Human law applied to incidents within the reservation, but elsewhere the settlers were subject to Shandikar law. One of the earliest cases he had overseen had involved a drunken miner who had strayed out of the reservation and crashed his aircar, killing a young Shand. The miner had been sentenced to be set free in the savannah, hunted down and killed with poisoned darts.

Mackendrick had been involved with several similar cases – a biologist similarly executed for trapping a sacred species of flying lizard, a teenager blinded for getting lost and wandering through a burial ground – and that was why he had been so angry with Belinda, nearly seven years ago.

He had only wanted to protect her. He had only been trying to avoid losing her altogether.

Belinda. Eight years his junior, the mother of his son, Philip. Dynamic, curious, given over to frequent moods and whims. Where he had been a tree, planted firmly in the ground, Belinda had been a kite, lofted up on the slightest breeze. He would have done anything to avoid letting her go.

Back then, the Shands had taken a sudden interest in human affairs. They flew regularly over the main settlement at Lieutenant's Creek; they had even set up camp just beyond the perimeter of the reservation and encouraged curious humans to visit.

As Overseer, Mackendrick had gone out to the encampment, wary of the sudden change in the relationship with the aboriginals, sure that it would end in another grim "incident." What he had found was like something out of an old movie: a religious retreat, an alien ashram.

A young Shand had shown him around, explaining as best it could in its breathy, aspirated English. Taller and leaner than most of its kind, the top of the Shand's head was level with Mackendrick's eyes. The dignity of the creature's look – the way it stood, the smooth grey face with large eyes and broad mouth – had been starkly at odds with the animal physicality of its body: a heavy pelt covering broad chest and shoulders, a heavy web of skin connecting its long arms to its flanks.

"Your people are learning the way of the –" What it said next was a guttural phrase Mackendrick had heard before. Some humans pronounced it as *hethetherah*, and translated it as *voice* or *communication*, but clearly the young Shand was unhappy with such a literal translation. Mackendrick knew the Shands used the phrase in a more religious sense, a form of communication for which there was no English equivalent: something between prayer and some kind of empathic resonance.

Even though it was technically illegal for humans to leave the reservation without an official pass, Mackendrick learned that, over the past week or two, dozens of colonists had visited the Shandikar encampment. His dilemma was to decide whether he should have the police enforce the rules and prevent this mixing, or allow it to continue as a kind of informal experiment in liberalizing the regime of human settlement on Shannon's Break.

It had been easy to just leave things as they were, as if putting it out of his mind would somehow prevent an incident from occurring.

But Belinda had brought the encampment back to his attention a few weeks later. He had come back to their apartment late one evening to find her arguing with Philip. The bitter silence when he walked in had not fooled him for a second. "What's going on?" he had demanded. "Why the atmosphere?"

Philip snorted, as only an angry 18-year-old can. "Ask her," he muttered.

Mackendrick had raised his eyebrows at his wife, and was relieved to see a smile in response. "Poor Phil's just like you, dear," she told him. "A rationalist through and through. I was merely trying to explain to him the principles of *hethetherahism* to him."

"Principles?" asked Mackendrick. The human drifters who had congregated at the Shand encampment had developed a kind of cult around what they understood of the aboriginals' spiritual beliefs. As soon as he heard the phrase on Belinda's lips, he had recognized the awful inevitability of her attraction to such a sect.

He had felt a sudden anger, then. "What have principles got to do with a bunch of losers like that?"

His anger had hurt her, and he had turned to Philip in the belief that in his son, at least, he would find support. But Philip turned away from them both in disgust, approving of neither.

That had been the crisis point, Mackendrick saw in retrospect: the moment when all the tensions had risen to the surface, when the lines of defence had been set out and carved in stone. That had been when he started to lose them both.

They flew south to where the trees became denser – more open forest than savannah – and then the host of flying Shands guided them in to land in the centre of a great oval clearing. Something about the silence which prevailed, and the ribbed architecture of the overhanging foliage of the high, surrounding trees brought to mind the interior of a cathedral.

Five Shands landed at the far end of the clearing, while the others swooped and glided overhead like observing angels.

By the time Mackendrick had climbed out of the aircar, a dozen members of the Xenobiological Survey had emerged from the forest to greet them. He stared at Sal Lawrence, the head of the team. "Perhaps you can tell me what's going on, Sal?" he demanded, with some of his old authority.

"Philip set out at five this morning," she said, eyes flitting from Mackendrick to Bronowski and back. "Our camp is a kilometre south-west of here, not far from the ruins at Kazkah. Philip's been studying the inscriptions on the Kazkah Stones. He was always going off on his own like that."

Sal was being cagey. It was against the terms of the Survey's licence for individuals to go off on their own and she knew her job was at stake. But then Phil wasn't really a member of her team; he was an archaeologist. She wasn't responsible for him.

Mackendrick sighed. "I'm not the Overseer any more, Sal," he said. "You can relax. I just want to know what happened – what kind of hole my son has dug for himself. Okay? So what happened?"

"Over the past two years we've established communications with the local community of Shands," she said.

"Some of the youngsters have been designated as kind of spokespeople. A few hours ago one of them came looking for me. He said Philip had been detained. He asked if Philip had what they call a 'blood-tied-speaker' – loosely speaking, that's a cross between a legal representative and a kinsman. I thought of you immediately."

Mackendrick, with Bronowski hurrying along at his side, left the Survey people and headed across the clearing towards the waiting chevron of five aliens. Antares burned in a diffuse haze through the tree-tops, filling the clearing with a heady burgundy light. Mackendrick was intensely aware of the hundreds of aliens still circling above the clearing, or gathered in the upper branches of the surrounding trees.

One of the Shands, a tall figure with a thick, sable pelt, was clearly the leader of the group. It stared at Mackendrick, unblinking, as he came to stand before them.

Mackendrick dipped his head. "I am the father... the blood-tied-speaker... of the man you are detaining," he said.

The alien sketched a lateral gesture in the air and then spoke in a sliding sequence of gasps and sighs.

Bronowski listened intently and as soon as the Shand paused he replied in similar tones.

"What did it say?" asked Mackendrick when he had finished. "What did you tell them, Bron?"

"They told us that there is to be a hearing immediately. I replied that you assert your right as Philip's blood-tied-speaker to attend. They assented."

"What has Philip done, Bron? What sort of hearing is it going to be?"

Bronowski spoke again in the alien tongue, then listened intently as the leader of the Shands replied.

There was a silence.

"Well? What is it, Bron? What's going on?"

Bronowski looked uneasy. "He... trespassed. That much is clear. I think he must have transgressed in some way religious, something to do with their ancestors. I'm sorry I can't be more definite – his tone of voice implies the context, and I find that tone ambiguous."

Mackendrick nodded. Bronowski was a good man – Mackendrick could wish for no one better to be by his side in such a situation. "What now, then?" he asked.

"They request that we follow them."

As the two spoke, the Shands had retreated to the edge of the clearing, where a track led into the interior.

"They would normally fly, of course," said Bronowski. "But they make allowances for what they call our physical inadequacies. There is a trail and they have made it safe, by which they mean that they have temporarily unconsecrated the ground we will walk across so that we can follow them without fear of penalty."

"How far are we going, Bron?"

"Approximately five kays south, to where they have an encampment."

The two men followed the aliens, and soon the heavy foliage closed in around them, shutting them off from the clearing. Mackendrick became suddenly aware of the heat, the humidity in the air.

He could think of nothing but his son, and the danger he faced. Philip had always been a sensible boy, mature beyond his years. He was not the kind to take foolish risks.

So why was Mackendrick trekking into the Shand

heartlands to take part in Philip's trial?

The track through the forest straightened out. Now Mackendrick could see two Shands at the head of the procession. Between them they carried what looked like the dried pelt of one of their kind, slung like a stretcher between two parallel poles.

From the rear, a steady chanting rose up, an eerie ululation that echoed through the forest. Mackendrick had never heard anything so unnerving in his life. He glanced back and saw two Shands carrying another pelt at the back of the procession.

Bronowski met his look. "We have entered sacred territory now," he said. "Our hosts are negotiating our safe passage with their ancestral spirits. The first skin is that of an outcast – his wild spirit allows us passage. The second skin is that of a revered elder, sealing and reconsecrating the way after us. The Shandikar use the skins of their ancestors as a medium through which they speak to the souls of the departed."

Mackendrick was familiar with this spirit worship from his days as Overseer. He had taken great pains to familiarize himself with the Shandikar, so that he could handle any conflicts which arose. It was this pseudo-religious gobbledegook that had attracted Belinda to the Shands nearly seven years before, tearing the family apart – first with rows and then with far worse.

After what seemed like hours, the path began to climb, and through the forest canopy Mackendrick glimpsed the spur of rock which, honeycombed with cave-mouths, was the home of this particular tribe.

They passed from the forest and into the full, ruddy light of Antares. Among the rocks scattered around a wide area, Mackendrick saw thousands of aliens. They were sitting on their heels, arms wrapped about their shoulders so that their flying webs shawled their knees and shins. They regarded the humans in accusatory silence.

The leader of the Shands spoke to Bronowski, who translated for Mackendrick. "Your son is in that cave." He indicated a dark opening several metres up the nearest cliff-face. "You have only a matter of minutes before the hearing begins. You can talk with him until then."

There was a pole, lashed with cross-struts, propped against the cliff. They must have made it specially for the humans, Mackendrick supposed.

He hesitated for a long time before approaching the rickety ladder and climbing up to the cave.

Philip sat just in the shadow of the cave-mouth, where he could see out across the settlement. Now, he stared at his father, his face expressionless.

Mackendrick didn't know what to say, where to start after so long. He opened his mouth, but it was Philip who spoke first.

"So," he said. "You couldn't stay away, then. You and death are never far apart."

He had only ever wanted to stop her from getting out of her depth. He couldn't bear to lose her.

Six and a half standard years ago, just as suddenly as they had taken a renewed interest in the human settlers and set up a camp near the reservation, the Shandikar had decided to move on. Some of their human followers accepted their decision gracefully. Others were distraught, like children abandoned by their parents.



Others still had taken it as a sign. Whether the Shands had said anything explicitly or not, these humans had taken their decision as an invitation: not only were the Shands moving on, but so too were their human followers.

Mackendrick could not sit back and let this happen. The human settlement had been negotiated under strict terms with the Shandikar nearly 80 years before: under conditions stipulated both by Shandikar law and Earth's Code of Settlement, any human movement beyond agreed boundaries had to be strictly limited. As Planetary Overseer, Mackendrick could not have groups of settlers simply wandering off into the heartlands because a group of Shands may or may not have said it was okay. His position was clear.

It was nothing to do with the fact that Belinda wanted to go along with them, that she was one of the prime movers behind the cult's decision to follow the Shands.

It had nothing to do with Belinda at all.

Even now, after more than six years, he could close his eyes and instantly he was back in his office in the government building in the town of Lieutenant's Creek, his comms panel shrilling at him. Its tone was no different to any other of the 40 or 50 calls he took in an average day, but he had known instantly that it was a portent of disaster.

If he closed his eyes he could see quite clearly the look on Captain Rosetti's face: the reluctance, the guilt, the responsibility.

"Overseer Mackendrick," he had said in his soft Bronx twang. "I'm sorry but I have to inform you of an irregularity in this morning's operation."

*Irregularity.* Official language could express tragedy in such neutral terms. Mackendrick had ordered the police in to prevent the cult members from following the Shands, but, under Rosetti's command, they had interpreted their instructions far too enthusiastically. Of 27 cult members, they had arrested twelve and – when one officer had opened fire they had all joined in – killed eight. The remaining seven had fled and were traced over the next few days lying low in the town.

Belinda had been one of the eight. She had been a part of Rosetti's *irregularity*.

He had only wanted to stop her from doing anything foolish.

Mackendrick and Bronowski were invited to sit at the centre of the packed-earth clearing in the shadow of the spur, the five Shand seated in arrow-head formation before them. A glossy silver pelt was carefully spread across the rocks nearby – even the spirits of the dead, Mackendrick recalled, must attend such a gathering. Philip sat to one side, hemmed in by a cordon of Shand guards, a spectator at his own hearing.

All around, perched one above the other on the rocks like an audience of crows or vultures, were the rest of the tribe, regarding the humans impassively. As back-drop, the great ruddy hump of Antares fulminated in majestic silence.

The elder Shand spoke.

Bronowski leaned towards Mackendrick and translated, in a low, reverent mutter. "They will first recount Philip's... misdemeanours, then they will inform us... you... of his punishment."

"Can we appeal?" It all sounded very final. "Can I speak on his behalf?" In only three of the hearings he had attended before as Overseer had he been allowed to speak. He wondered if his role as blood-tied-speaker might allow him to do so now, but after a brief exchange with the elder, Bronowski shook his head.

"The punishment has already been decided upon," he told Mackendrick. "Apparently there has already been some kind of preliminary hearing."

Now, another Shand stood and started to speak. It was as tall as the elder, with a jet-black pelt and aggressive, twitchy mannerisms.

"Early today," Bronowski translated, "as the gracious Antares rested on the horizon... Philip trespassed... or 'invaded', he says – the speaker's intonation is very hostile. Philip invaded sacred territory. A burial ground on the western fringe of the Kazkah Stones. It is one of this tribe's most sacrosanct plots of ground, where they bury their most exalted elders. Philip tainted the hallowed ground by allowing his unclean, or unblessed, shadow to come between their god, Antares, and the holy earth."

Bronowski paused, and Mackendrick felt a sudden, heady surge of optimism. Surely such a transgression was trivial! But he reminded himself that he was dealing with alien minds, alien priorities. He recalled the case he had dealt with nine or ten years ago: a teenager who had committed a similar offence had escaped lightly – he had merely been blinded in punishment.

The elder spoke again. Minutes later, Bronowski translated hesitantly.

"Quite apart from desecrating holy ground with his shadow, Philip addressed the attendant of the burial ground." Now, Bronowski refused to look at Mackendrick as he went on: "The attendant was a holy man, a shaman. He had taken a vow of silence as a juvenile, more than 50 standard years ago. The only time he spoke was with the voices of the dead. He was... their word translates most closely as pure, but it has a far more spiritual, extreme meaning than that one word can convey. He was intensely pure and now, having been addressed by an unclean alien he is no longer pure. He is no longer a suitable vessel for the spirits to use."

Bronowski indicated the silvery pelt, spread out nearby. "The holy man killed himself immediately, as was his duty. He attends this trial in spirit only."

Mackendrick swallowed. He glanced across at his son, wondering how much of this he was taking in. He knew Philip had studied Shandikar culture closely, but he did not know if he was talented enough a linguist to follow the proceedings as Bronowski could.

Philip just sat there, meeting Mackendrick's glance with a steely, defiant glare.

"Without their shaman," Bronowski continued, "the tribe are without their connection to the spirit world. They have no *hethetherah*. They are without god. Their fall from grace will last several weeks, until a new shaman is selected. In the meantime, Antares demands recompense: a temporary vessel must be substituted."

Through his grief, Mackendrick's pragmatism asserted itself. "Ask the elder what can be done," he told Bronowski. "Whatever is in my power to do I will do. We need to get Philip out of here, Bron."

Bronowski spoke and the Shands listened.

The elder replied briefly, then immediately rose and

turned away.

"We must go with them," Bronowski said. "I think they want us to witness Philip's punishment."

Mackendrick swallowed grimly, then climbed to his feet. He looked at Philip again, said, "You'll be okay, Phil, do you hear? It'll all work out."

Philip spat into the dirt as his guards led him after the elder.

The procession marched diagonally across the foot of the nearest cliff-face, then headed through a narrow defile to a rocky platform which looked out across the fringe of the forest, full into the bloody glare of Antares.

In the clearing below, two teams of Shands were hauling on ropes. They were pulling the tops of two whip-like tree-ferns down so that their crowns touched at ground level. When they had done this, they lashed the trees to stakes in the ground, so that their trunks described great curved bows against the glowering sun.

The elder had been speaking, and now Bronowski resumed his translation. "The elders have decided that Philip must atone for his crimes by becoming a temporary vessel for the ancestral spirits. Humans can be used for this, but only at the extremes of their existence. He will be treated with psychotropic drugs, which they have found in the past to be efficacious in opening up the human mind. And then... then he will be tied between the trunks and the trees will be returned to their former positions. He will remain there, under the eye of their god, Antares, until a new shaman can be selected, or until he dies, whichever comes first." Bronowski fell silent and bowed his head.

Mackendrick was aware of the watching eyes of the Shands all around him. As if they were waiting to see how he would respond.

He tried to speak, but couldn't. He swallowed, started again. "Tell them that Philip did not know what he was doing. Tell them it was an accident, a mistake."

But Bronowski remained silent.

"Bron?"

In a voice almost too soft to hear, Bronowski said, "But Philip is an archaeologist, Mr Mackendrick. I spoke to him only two weeks ago about Shand religious practices. He is very well informed on the matter."

Mackendrick stared at his friend.

Bronowski said, "So you see, for whatever reasons, your son must have intended all this." and he gestured towards the drawn trees, poised ready for their victim.

The elder Shand was speaking again. "In Shandikar law," Bronowski translated, "a compromise can sometimes be negotiated."

"What?" Mackendrick snapped. "What is it?"

"That is why they were so adamant that a blood-tied-speaker should attend," Bronowski said.

"Tell me!"

Unable to meet his former superior's look, Bronowski told him: "You can take your son's place," he said. "You can be punished on his behalf."

They were leading Philip across the clearing below, now. Mackendrick did not have long. He stared at Bronowski, waited until his look was met. "He knew this would happen, didn't he?"

Bronowski shrugged. "He is an intelligent man," he said.

Mackendrick nodded. Six and a half years. Six and a half years to avenge his mother's death.

He reached out and squeezed Bronowski's arm. "Tell them I wish to go in Philip's place. Tell them I will be their temporary vessel."

Bronowski spoke, and immediately the elder gestured sharply and called down to the group leading Philip to his punishment.

Mackendrick stared at his son's pale face. He couldn't blame him for this. "Philip!" he called down. "I'm sorry, Philip. You can go back with Bron. I accept everything!"

But it wasn't as he had expected. Philip jerked away from his guards as understanding seeped through. "No!" Mackendrick heard him cry. "No, leave him out of this!"

And Philip ran towards the trees.

If not revenge, then what?

When Mackendrick arrived at the two bent trees, Philip was sprawled on the ground, sobbing into the dirt.

"It's over, Philip," Mackendrick said softly.

Then Philip looked up with such pain in his eyes that Mackendrick finally understood. It was just like him – cynical, rational, calculating – to assume that his son was after revenge, but it was something far more than that, something Mackendrick could barely even begin to touch.

"Can't you see?" begged Philip. "Can't you just stay out of it? This is all wrong!"

Mackendrick had misunderstood. Philip had not been after revenge: he had wanted to take the punishment himself, to speak to the spirits of the dead!

Mackendrick remembered Belinda's accusation that he and Philip had been cast from the same cynical, rationalist mould. But somewhere along the line Philip had changed.

Sadly, he turned to Bronowski. "Take care of him, Bron. Make sure he doesn't do anything foolish." And then he turned away from his friend and his son, and stared into the face of Antares.

Mackendrick raised the tin goblet to his lips and tasted its contents. The liquid looked like some kind of sherry, but it was hot with exotic spices, and it left a distinct metallic after-taste. He tipped the goblet and drank it all.

He raised his arms and two Shand guards bound his wrists gently but tightly to the opposing trees.

Then they let the trunks slowly upright. The joints in his arms and legs detonated as they were wrenched from their sockets and the small bones of his wrists and ankles snapped. The pain became unbearable and Mackendrick screamed until his throat was afire, and then the drug-laden drink rushed over his senses, numbing the agony to a steady, thudding, whole-body ache.

As the trees reached their fullest extent, Mackendrick hung his head back and cried out as the swollen, blood-red dome of Antares stared down on him without mercy.

And then the voices began...

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**Keith Brooke & Eric Brown** have contributed many independently written stories to these pages, as well as two previous collaborations: "Appassionata" (#109) and "Sugar and Spice" (#112). Each has had three sf novels published. Keith lives in Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, and Eric lives in Haworth, West Yorkshire.



# MUTANT POPCORN

Nick Lowe



Thank you for making this time, sir. We know how busy you are, but we thought you'd appreciate an update on current operations for the 2000 campaign. You'll recollect that focus groups have been recommending a platform based on the following pledges: an immediate end to pain, evil and dysfunctionality; eradication of death within five years; the resurrection of the body, including loved ones, extinct species and celebrities; and face-to-face access to God for every American. Yes, sir. Yes, we understand that these will be tough pledges to deliver, but they're what the people feels it now deserves, and our analysis is that anything less could jeopardize our whole campaign strategy. So to prepare the ground, we've been systematically infiltrating their dreams, working with our people on the inside to make sure the movies are on-message for the Millennium. We've put together a showreel of recent work, and I think you'll be quite pleased with our progress.

First off, **Contact**. You'll recall that the purpose of this operation was to hijack the name and work of Carl Sagan, a man of exemplary decency and intellectual integrity whom most Americans viewed as the friendly, trustworthy public face of science, for a memorial project that would utterly pervert everything Sagan had stood for as a sane, patient opponent of unreason, fundamentalism, and popular non-science. In this we were only about 80% successful – it's still a nervously agnostic movie that favours non-denominational diet theism over fundamentalist godbothering – but we feel we did a highly effective job of twisting Sagan's message into a puke-

making homily on the reconcilability of science and faith. For this to work, we needed to keep Sagan himself in the audience's mind on our terms, so we had the great idea of reworking the John Hurt character: a benevolent genius orbiting the production at a remote distance, kept off the project itself by his terminal cancer, with an enhanced *ex machina* role as what Greimas calls the *destinateur*, the guy offstage who bankrolls the plot. No, really, people will think it's a tasteful and moving tribute.

We used people we've worked with before, like Jim Hart and Bob Zemeckis. Zemeckis was a pussycat; all you need to do is let him show off a bit, give the balloon a couple extra pumps. We told him he could mess around with news footage and former celebrities playing themselves, and he was just happy as a clam on raspberry Prozac. Some of us were a bit worried when Jodie Foster got on board, because she got all this stuff out of the lines that made a travesty of Hart's attempt to keep her character as bland as milkshake. But then we had the great idea of playing her off against Matthew McConaughey, who's been doing some of the most charisma-free work since early Dennis Quaid, and when we saw them together we knew we'd got the right team. You could have filled a fire extinguisher with the sparks between them. Then we made him really big on the posters and drew Jodie really badly. Slide, please. Yeah, I guess it was kind of petty, but she was endangering the feebleness of the whole project.

*Contact* was Sagan's airport-novel dream of an ideal world in which his beloved SETI came up trumps: not just

finding a signal of intelligent origin, but realizing the green men are faxing through the script for a full bootstrap scenario so the representative of the human race can beam up right now. We optioned it early, because research shows alien contact now is a preferred consumer option. Nobody wants to wait for it to be the future; they feel they've earned instant cosmic gratification in this world, and Sagan's scenario was right on the button. It's a cleverly-positioned novel, pitched at the mainstream so as to be neither non-fiction nor science fiction in a way that captures the awkward, ambivalent status of SETI itself: flakey, marginal, career-killing, a budgetary embarrassment so long as it draws blank, but suddenly the most important project in human history if and when it gets a result. It's also a novel that deals frankly with the realities of science funding, the delicate political compromises with the forces of dumbness that have to be renegotiated each fiscal year. Obviously we got Zemeckis to soften up on this; we told him "it's just like producing a movie, where you have to sell your vision to soulless dicks in suits who don't even know how to dream in colour," and he swallowed the bait halfway out his ass, with whole plot chunks staged as story conferences and production meetings.

Sagan was already pretty sick while we were shooting, so the one potential obstacle was Sagan's widow Ann Druyan – who co-authored the original movie treatment on which the novel was based, and was named in the original spat with the publishers over allegations of collaboration in the novel, for which Sagan had been paid a monster advance as sole author. But

our spin people came up with a neat argument that we weren't doing anything out of line with the spirit of Sagan's ending. At the end of the novel, Ellie vindicates her narrative by locating the hermeneutic McGuffin tipped by her cosmic instructor: the non-random string around the 1020th decimal place of  $\pi$  that demonstrates the artificiality of the laws of mathematics, and thus the createdness of physical law. In the novel, this is actually the culmination of an enjoyable, very Saganly debate about what would constitute scientifically persuasive evidence of God's existence. Needless to say, we dropped all that stuff pretty smartish, and just used it as an excuse to get God back into the movie by a different and much bigger back door. Sagan has this minor character called Falmer Joss, a sympathetic fundamentalist pundit who serves as the *advocatus diaboli* in the novel's science/religion debates. One of the guys in the office had the great idea of making this character younger, blonder, and blander so as to be less offensive to real fundamentalists, and promoting him to the heroine's love interest instead of the guy in the book. (Here he is in the sack with her in the first reel.) So now we've got a Jesus-peddler on the inside, mouthing lines like "I couldn't vote for someone who thinks that the other 95% of us [the ones who believe in a deity] suffer from some kind of mass delusion." And the last act, Ellie's own passage through the Dave Bowman experience and her resurrection in an unbelieving world, is visualized and dramatized in openly messianic terms, using the Passion as its narrative template in a way that would be shocking if it weren't so shameless.

But the main thing you'll notice we've done is to subvert Sagan's lifelong scientism with one of our most versatile big lies, the finesse that equates science with capitalism and blames the former for the consequences of the latter. McConaughey's book is called *Losing Faith: The Search for Meaning in the Age of Reason*, and expounds the myth that science is to blame for the decline in individual happiness, self-esteem, and sense of purpose – while big dream projects like movies, we suggest, are the solution and the means to restore our faith. As you well know, sir, it's actually the movies that are the problem, and science that's made living in a world of inflated aspiration as bearable as it is. You'll remember Dr James's briefing, just before he defected to the media, about how it's precisely the rising levels of wish-fulfilment fantasy foisted on us by the movies that are increasing measurable levels of depression despite rising living standards, by widening the gulf between dreams and attainability so that serotonin levels crash and the public is all the more dependent on

our own supply of feelgood input... Oh, don't worry, sir, we booked him on some dodgy talkshows and his credibility is now under control.

While we're here, you might like a quick update on *Photographing Fairies*. This one fell into our hands when the script went through the EU's development fund, which you'll remember we control through a series of dummy holding companies registered in Guinea-Bissau. We were concerned that punters might spot that it's exactly the same plot as *Contact*, and that in both cases we've grafted it on to a novel with a quite incompatible original storyline. But we figured we'd covered ourselves by starting from a messy, irritating first novel by a painter from Cleveland, OH, and giving it to a bunch of faggoty Brits to make a Screen Two thing for 20 pee that nobody would watch apart from a few Barbican types and a retired couple in Northants. Unfortunately, the operation was a mixed success: we failed to take account of the involvement of a number of regrettably good people, who proceeded to tear up the plot, reshuffle all the characters, and delete all the attempted humour. With hindsight, we should have kept more of an eye on the director and co-writer Nick Willing, given the thickness of the file on his mum. Uh, yes sir, Paula Rego, aka earth's greatest living painter, the great white witch of Camden Road, &c. We had her under surveillance between '87 and '95 under suspicion of being the

supreme being, but intelligence now believes she's just a harmless genius. I especially like the way that, where ordinary artists just BS or stonewall if you ask them to explain their work, Willing's mum launches into these fantastically detailed and specific hidden narratives... Yes, sir. Sorry, sir. No, sir, I won't.

Of course, for anyone with their antennae pointed the right way, the parallels with *Contact* are so close as to reveal the common fingerprint of a universal creator. Can we have the split screen, please? OK, this is *Contact* on the left and *Fairies* on the right; see if you can spot the difference. You start with a prologue showing how the central character's whole life is built around one relationship, whose tragic and premature bereavement propels them to seek refuge in science, and a sceptic's dissatisfied quest for a rational, scientifically satisfying means of access to other worlds. Jodie Foster loses her dad, and turns to SETI; Toby Stephens loses his bride, and turns to trick photography and theosophy, debunking the Cottingley fairy photos (80 years early) only to find himself drawn into a more sceptic-proof parallel case. For both these hardnosed sceptics are secretly driven by the need to believe, and when a message from beyond arrives they jump at the chance to contact the other side, finally arriving at a moment of transcendence where they prove their faith to the faithless by stepping voluntarily through a portal of death (Stephens goes to the gallows,

Below and opposite: Jody Foster in *Contact* ...she got all this stuff out of the lines that made a travesty of Hart's attempt to keep her character as bland as milkshake...



Foster to a very electric chair). And each is rewarded on the other side with their heart's desire, though the evidence they seek is erased and the final step a leap of faith in darkness.

As you can see, the end result is actually quite thoughtful and moving, despite a heavily starched script and characters with all the depth and realism of cutouts on strings. We did manage to ensure that only Toby Stephens and Ben Kingsley had much to work with, and once more we were especially pleased with the love interest, which lacks any kind of motivation, chemistry, or conviction. So when Emily Woof makes her final plea (here's the clip: "Out there's the real world, with trams and teadances and bills to pay and children to raise"), the audience will be thinking "Nah, ditch the working-class tottie and top yourself, we want to see the fairies again." We've worked hard to keep the focus on the feelgood metaphysical message (this is Stephens talking now): "the physical reality of the next world: a taste of heaven, a place where all wounds are healed, all fractures mended; where people are made complete." And here he is with Conan Doyle: "What if the next world is as real as Clacton-on-Sea?" (This came from a canvas we did that showed that 70% of Americans think heaven is as real as Tivoli, NY.) Uh, yes, sir, I see the clock.

I guess we can go straight to *Spawn* at this time. The main problem we had with Todd McFarlane's state-of-the-industry integrated franchise of soaraway comics title and branded spinoffs was freezing out the quality. McFarlane's shown willingness to invest in the kind of writing talent –

Moore, Gaiman, Morrison – that occasionally threatens to lift his dreary product way above the level of its material. Happily, we managed to maintain the purity of McFarlane's vision, heh heh, and we feel we've ended up with a movie that not only manages to be as bad as the very worst of an uneven title, but distills the essence of bad comics in the 1990s: pompous, infantile, cliché-driven, a nasty cocktail of adolescent male fantasies about death and evil that manages to wish away the reality of either. It certainly captures better than any other comics movie to date what leading-edge superhero comics are really like: the combination of epic visuals and staggering conceptual banality, mixing breathtaking vistas of other worlds with dialogue like "You set me up, you malignant sow!" (sow??), and supervillains so absurd they can only be played by Martin Sheen talking very very deep or John Leguizamo in a prosthetic fart-suit.

Pitched at a spottier, dumber and considerably sadder sector of the audience, *Spawn* is nevertheless just as keen as *Contact* and *Fairies* to waft away the reality of death, which is here just a mechanism of empowerment: turning angst, alienation and feelings of rejection into cool physique and funky necroplasmic superpowers, with unlimited opportunities for brutal revenge on everyone who failed to appreciate you in life. Just like suicide, really. Dead guys even retain something that masquerades as moral choice, which is about whether you take your vengeance as graphically as possible now, or go through a bunch of silly plot twists and flatulent displays of angst first. And dead people can still express their problems with

authority: if the boss of hell wants you to lead his army of the apocalypse, you have the option to kick his forkytailed butt and resume the existence of a troubled loner. (Given that the whole setup is that *Spawn* is already dead, you can see that the Lord of Darkness is onto a bit of a loser when his best threat is "If you fail me – you DIE!")

Yes, sir, we did think about having you play yourself, like Clinton's made to do in *Contact*. But we felt a rather primitive CG simulation would be better for our overall strategy: we don't want anyone to believe for a moment that the armies of the apocalypse are really waiting to roll, so we've packaged it up in this gothic nonsense with plenty of explosions and a nice Graham Revell soundtrack. Remember this is only the beginning of our roll-out between now and the big day; by the time the 2000 campaign is officially launched, our message will have achieved 95% penetration, any remaining pockets of intelligence and contact with reality will be too isolated to be effective, and the audience should be in an ideal receptive state to welcome our reachout programme. The biggest challenges have been synchronizing the charges so all the graves will open on time, and of course fixing the rollover on our network servers. But the legions are ready, the furnaces are stoked, and the party machine is oiled up and raring to go. I really feel we've learned a lot from last time around; this time, we're not going to get beaten to the punch by some smooth-talking liberal advocating abolition of the death penalty for original sin. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. All hail, sir.

Nick Lowe

## Judith Merrill interview *continued from page 15*

talked to was in mourning and the cry was, "What has Kubrick done to Clarke?" They said, "there is no story," right? Now, this is a film that played and played and played, and that people went back to and back to and back to, but the sf community – at least in that version – found it boring, stupid, without a story. It did not fit the pulp formula. Now, many of these people went on years later to write some exciting stuff that did not fit the pulp formula, but at that time they had their backs stiffened, their teeth snarling and their hands clawed against what Kubrick did to Clarke – as they did against what they thought I was doing in praising *New Worlds*.

*Do you think that attitude is dead and gone now?*

Well, I don't think so. If you talk to some of the people who were angry then they would still be angry now. They would still fight the same fight, but nevertheless what they are read-

ing and writing has been changed completely, stemming from what was happening at that time, and some of them know it and some of them don't.

*What do you think it was that caused that big change in the 1960s? Have you any idea?*

You mean in science fiction? Probably the same things that have been causing big changes in the world, whatever they may be.

*What was it that made you decide to leave the States at the end of the 60s and take up residence in Canada?*

I had begun to find it intolerable being an American citizen. I had been very critical of the US government, particularly with reference to foreign policy, for many years, increasingly critical. This was about three-quarters of the year that I lived in Britain in the mid-60s. The Vietnam War was getting more and more disastrous, and I found myself reacting to British friends who would say things like,

"What are you guys going to do with the world now that you've taken it over from us?" After a while I started thinking, "yes, we have. We have taken over the world, and what are we going to do with it and what control do I have over what we're going to do with it?" And in fact the first thing this did was drive me back to the States – I might otherwise have stayed in Britain much longer. I went home with a very clear formulation in my mind. There were all these people in the States talking about a revolution, and I had to find out if indeed there was any kind of revolution about to happen and if so locate it and join it; and, if not, leave the States. One was faced with the problem of being a voting citizen in a democracy, a so-called democracy, where I was responsible for the actions of the government, and I could not tolerate that responsibility. So I went back, found a Toronto anti-draft booklet, and wound up living in Canada.

IZ



OK, head out to your local video store and rent or buy a copy of *Hud*, the 1962 Paul Newman movie directed by Martin Ritt, and check out the scene where Newman's character Hud is in a bar and intervenes when someone threatens to take his nephew outside and beat him up for looking at the guy's girlfriend.

**Hud:** You didn't offer him any encouragement, by any chance, did you there, young lady?

**Girl:** No.

**Hud:** That's funny. I was sitting way over on the other side of the room and I got a little bit encouraged: maybe it's the way you move around inside that dress.

Well, folks, there you have it. The origin of my comment that the only reason for watching *Hercules* was the way Kevin Sorbo moves around inside those trousers. Yes, humourless feminist makes joke! And expects readers to spot the paraphrase.

I've had more stick about that particular comment than about almost anything I've ever written here. So it is with some trepidation that I return to the topic, or, more particularly, to the topic of *Hercules'* spin-off and sister programme, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, currently showing an hour later on Channel 5 on Saturday nights. Now I really hadn't expected to like *Xena*. I thought that it would turn out to be a jiggle show, in the way that *Charlie's Angels* was in the 1970s (a programme which purported to be about strong women doing good stuff but which in fact, of course, was about women with running shoes but no bras). The way Channel 5 chose to introduce *Xena* helped me get over the initial reluctance to watch: the trailer which had the female voice slaving "She... Will kick... Your butt! Reinforce yer pants!" still has me giggling. Yes, humourless feminist finally discovers *Xena* and *Hercules* are meant to be funny. Oh, so that's it.

Actually I should have noticed from the character names. I mean, Domestitus? This is *Up Pompeii* territory, shades of Lurcio. In fact Frankie Howerd would have made a splendid guest star in either *Xena* or *Hercules* – ooh, no, missus. But it took me a while to tune in to the level they were pitching it at. I thought they were just really, really bad at classical studies and couldn't afford to take on an unemployed Latin teacher to give them a few pointers. And then they called a character Stallonus and I started fantasizing that they had taken on an unemployed Latin teacher, and the unemployed Latin teacher was just taking the piss. And then they pinched some footage from your actual classic sword-and-sandal movie *Spartacus* (including the immortal "I'm Spartacus" – "I'm Spartacus" – "I'm Spartacus" moment) and I realized what they're actually going for is, well, the sly level of campy for grownups



but action for the kiddies that you get in the Adam West/Burt Ward *Batman* series. Just wait for the moment in 20 years time when today's tots watch *Xena* reruns as grown-ups and the penny finally drops – years of therapy!

As I am writing this, one of the week's big news stories is an attempt to put on a boxing tournament for women and girls and the predictable furore about whether this should happen or not. My own feeling is that, self-evidently, boxing is a stupid activity and should probably be banned on medical grounds. But, whilst I find I don't really care very much whether stupid people are allowed to watch other stupid people thrashing each other senseless or not, I find that I do care, quite a lot, about the question of whether girls are allowed to be stupid too. If boxing is to be a legal activity it should be legal for everyone, girls too. So, watching *Xena*, I find that I am absurdly pleased to see a programme where women are allowed to go around having full-on adventures, doing improbable stunts, performing ludicrous back-flips and generally kicking ass. And, joy of joys, *Xena* is rarely given girly crap to do which might undermine her heroine status.

Compare her, for example, with *La Femme Nikita* which has just crept shamefaced into C5's late-night schedules on Fridays. The original movie – and the Hollywood remake – both had *Nikita* as a killer who was condemned to death for murder but given a chance to stay alive and work for a secret government agency as a contract killer. The premise was that it's easy to find leggy girls who can look good in a frock but it's really hard to find leggy girls who can blow people away without a backwards glance. So it was worth the secret government agency's while to take the homicidal raw material and teach her how to be sufficiently girly for their purposes... And then the TV gods get hold of the concept and think – ooh, let's make a killer bimbo series. Yes! But let's not make her an actual, as it were, *killer*, because she'll have to be the main character and no one will like an girl who kills people – it's, well,

unladylike. So we'll make her innocent: wrongly accused. But she'll do what the agency wants... if she's convinced the bad guys really really deserve it, and if she feels guilty enough about it afterwards. *Bleah!*

I sometimes like my heroes amoral and existential: but I long for my heroines to be equally amoral and existential and not to have to justify their unladylike behaviour with a history of child-abuse or a star-cross'd love affair or whatever. A male hero can just shoot the bad guys because they're bad and that's what heroes do. A Ripley or a Sarah Connor has to be freighted down with small children to protect first. In fact, come to think of it, *Xena* had her improbable-change-of-heart from Bad Egg bit-part player to Good Guy series-lead as a result of the ickle baby that her warlord cohorts wanted to spear, didn't she? But even that turned into a hoot of a baby-hurling contest rather than a soppy sentimental cutefest. Realism is never going to be the selling point of a *Xena* or a *Hercules*: but watch *Hercules*, and you see an equivalent level of unreality to *Xena's*. That's all we've ever asked for, boys. If you can knock down 20 armed men with a single punch then we can levitate backwards-somersaults up trees yelling *yi-yi-yi* as we go. Is that really too much to ask?

But where does today's humourless feminist stand on the "girls in leather" issue? In other words, is the female audience's desire to see strong female characters outweighed by the male audience's desire to see girls in bits of leather and not much else? In fact, the main thing about *Hercules* and *Xena* is that they should be a pair: in this case Channel 5's decision to put a fatuous karaoke programme on in between them is a dumb idea. *Xena* on its own might be, marginally, offensive because it plays up to the cultural stereotype of women offered up to the male gaze even though it subverts the cultural stereotype of inactive women just about enough to get over it. But if it is paired with *Hercules* so that we get the equivalence – you look at the girls, we'll look at the boys – then the potential offensiveness is leached out and we can enjoy the good humour and the improbable plots guilt-free.

The last time there was a campaign against page-three glamour photos in daily newspapers I put forward the suggestion that equivalence would be the way to balance the conflicting desires of the anti-pornography and the anti-censorship fronts: you can look, boys, but only if we can look too. Decorating visual material with unfeasibly perfect flesh isn't necessarily offensive: it's only offensive if it's only ever unfeasibly perfect *female* flesh we get to look at.

Otherwise why were you all so threatened by the leather-trousers crack?

Wendy Bradley

# Calculated Risk

*Phil Masters*

*There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world.*

– Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Case of Identity”

I suppose that it was Destiny that, two days before I had arranged to travel, the first fire since it opened should close the tunnel. I had to make new arrangements, taking the ferry over, at a time when thousands of others were having to do the same – and I couldn’t use my position to make things easier, because I was supposed to be travelling inconspicuously, if not actually secretly.

I did almost wonder, for a while, if there might be anything sinister about the coincidence; of course there was a lot of speculation, during those first few days, about sabotage. But those of us with contacts heard the truth even sooner than the public; the fire was nothing but an accident, some kind of electrical short in one of those big, badly-maintained trucks that come rolling up from Songhai. And in any case, I did not truly believe that anyone would use crude sabotage, merely to delay a meeting. To think such a thing would be madness.

None of which made me any happier when the ferry sailed late, thanks to the chaos in the port. I ended up arriving in Tanjah an hour after I’d meant to be at the caravanserai, and then spending another hour chasing round the local urban rail system. It didn’t matter, strictly speaking; the contact had said he’d be there for several days. However, tidiness is a virtue in my employment, and the string of accidents left me irritated and nervous.

The caravanserai was in the old section of town, just behind the docks that face the Atlantic – not actually a sailors’ flop-house, but not prestigious, either. I went in through the courtyard, got hold of the clerk, and had my man called; he was using the name “Kemal.” Then I hung around in the porch in the gathering dusk while he came down. I made sure that my face was visible to anyone in most of the inward-facing upper-floor corridors, so that, if “Kemal” was being sensibly careful, he could confirm that I was who he wanted to meet, and not some guard-dog sent to drag him home – or to dump him off the docks.

He appeared after a couple of minutes, and I recognized him straight away; a good memory for faces is another

of my professional virtues. I’d met him four or five times at university parties during my stint at the embassy in Angora, before the Diwan decided that the guard-dogs might be feeling certain enough about my real status to start making trouble, and pulled me home.

His real name wasn’t Kemal, of course, although I would continue to use that throughout this mission. In Angora, he was rated as a shepherd, a member of the ruling classes, by virtue of his academic position, but his original family were flock, part of the controlled masses. (In fact, that was, so far as I’d been able to judge, the reason that he was brought out to meet the cynical foreigners. His was one of those rare promotions that do still happen over there, “proving” that the Ottoman system is indeed based on carefully assessed aptitude, and the fact that nine out of ten shepherds were born of shepherd parents just shows that aptitude is mostly genetic.)

Now, however, he was looking nothing like a Virtuous Leader of Society; he was looking like a university teacher who’s thinking of defecting. Amongst other things, he had a lightweight briefcase in each hand, which might not have been too prominent, except that both were chained to his wrists. I hoped that he hadn’t been wandering round Tanjah like that; never mind the Ottomans’ human guard-dogs, the Moravid police would have heard about him by now. However, the fact that he hadn’t had the cases hacked off his wrists, one way or another, suggested that he’d been discrete enough.

“Can we talk in a café?” he asked. “There’s one with quiet booths just down the road from here.”

It didn’t sound ideal, but on the other hand, nor was it as foolish as some people might believe. The chance of being eavesdropped at random by someone with the wit and determination to do anything dangerous would actually be low.

And the café was indeed reasonably discrete, but busy enough to provide a babble of voices to cover our discussion. Either this fellow was lucky, or he had some sense. We sat down, and I ordered coffee, while Kemal asked for Qat tea. Presumably his nerves were getting to him. He looked around carefully, then quickly detached his briefcases from his wrists and chained

them to the table.

"We understand that you have information to sell," I said.

He nodded. "Two sets of information," he said, indicating the cases, "separate, but related."

"Really? You only provided samples of one."

"And what did your experts make of those samples?"

I paused to think on that question; it was unexpectedly direct, obliging me to decide how much to acknowledge. I decided to be reasonably straightforward. "They were interested," I said, "but a little puzzled. They considered that you were telling us about an interesting innovation in theoretical mathematical philosophy. They thought that the shepherds would tend to publicize such work freely, once it was complete. It would reflect well on the creative brilliance of the Ottoman people, while they thought that it had no conceivable applicability to weaponry."

"Weaponry? Perhaps not. And no doubt they suggested that it was the work of Persians or Indians in Ottoman employ."

I didn't bother to comment on that – although he was right, in fact. He might be running from Angora, but he evidently had the usual Ottoman touchiness.

"Anyway," he said, "you passed as a scholar-diplomat when I first met you, so you evidently have some knowledge of social philosophy." I nodded. "So you can tell me what you make of this material yourself."

He pulled a sheaf of papers out of one of his cases, just as our order arrived. Then he passed them to me.

I took a few minutes to look through the material, then looked at him. "At first glance, it's impressive," I acknowledged, "at least if you accept the underlying Omarite ideological assumptions..."

"No," he said, "there's nothing there that you or I couldn't defend in the most liberal schools in Granada or Cordova."

That was a slight exaggeration – but not much. Omarite theories of social history may be tangled up with Ottoman state ideology, but both the underlying theory and most of the theoretical developments are actually reasonably sound.

"Very well," I said, "so it's a remarkably detailed piece of historical analysis. I'd also say that it was purely an academic exercise, obviously, and not even very innovative."

"That's how it would look on its own, I suppose." He was evidently edgy, but I also read him as strangely curious; he genuinely wanted to know what I might be making of all this. "But I'm guessing that your experts may have told you enough for you to guess why these two sets of information are related."

I said nothing for a few moments, finishing the last thick dregs of my coffee. Then I looked him in the eye. "What are you asking for?" I asked.

He shrugged. "Your standard terms, I imagine. A new life. Protection. More money than I can ever make at home."

In fact, we had enough on him to guess his motives; they were neither exceptional nor especially reprehensible, beyond the fact that they were basically selfish. He was unlikely to be any sort of idealist, although I imagine that he could have wrapped his explanations up in some basic sophistry if anyone had insisted. Of course, the fact that he was here, hiding in Tanjah,

meant that he was committed; we could have him for any price. But we like to maintain our own façade of moral justification.

I nodded. "Accepted," I said.

"Furthermore, you must get me from here to safety within the next..." he pulled out his timepiece "...49 hours. Preferably less. And I must be escorted by armed agents. All of this is not negotiable."

That was odd, but doubtless he believed that he had good reason. "Accepted," I said. "Come on."

When we emerged from the café, he turned back towards the caravanserai, but I caught his arm. "A moment" I said, fumbling a miniature torch out of my pocket. I pretended to have some trouble with the switch, flashing it on and off three times in the process.

The cover man reached us a few moments later. It was someone I'd worked with before, a shadow specialist called Isa; as the name suggests, he was a Christian, a north-easterner – but very sharp and alert. I was glad to have him along.

"Any sign of trouble?" I asked.

"Not here." Isa smiled. "Nothing yet. This fellow has been exceptionally lucky. But I've had some calls in the last hour; the Diwan have been checking the Moravid transit records. There've been a dozen likely guard-dogs on the last three or four flights in to town from the east."

"That doesn't matter," I said, although it had in fact confirmed my decision. "We're extracting straight away."

Isa nodded and slipped back into the shadows. I caught Kemal's arm again, and steered him down the street, away from his caravanserai.

"Where are we going?" He was suddenly looking more nervous than at any time earlier.

"The docks," I said. "I'm fulfilling our agreement."

"Straight away? You have a boat there?" I nodded at that, and tried to study his expression in the half-light. My training in psychology was actually deeper than he probably guessed; although the social stuff helped me look like a respectable scholar to the Ottomans, it was the personal aspects – which any good Omarite despises – which assisted me in my real job. But at that moment, I was having trouble with him. Something about this plan was making him very nervous, although he wasn't rejecting it outright; he was just considering it very deeply, as though he really had a choice. I wondered if he disliked sea travel.

"Very well," he said, "if you consider this the best way to protect me."

I led him down and along the waterfront, staying on the busiest and best-lit streets wherever I could. Isa and at least two of his colleagues would be covering us, but they would take several seconds to reach us if a knife or pistol suddenly came out of the crowds. I'd rather have had one of them closer – I'm no combat expert – but I'd been told that this wasn't the best tactic in these situations; the specialists were better used monitoring for approaching threats.

That didn't make me comfortable, however. At first, I thought that Kemal shared my worries, but after a while, I realized that he wasn't watching the crowd at all. All his concerns seemed to be focused forwards.

Isa had signalled ahead, so when we reached the cor-



rect dock, two of the boat crew were on hand to welcome us. These weren't people that I knew, but they had an air of efficiency; once we were aboard, I relaxed substantially. Kemal, on the other hand, seemed more worried, especially when the boat cast off straight away. I decided that he must get sea-sick.

"Don't be nervous," I told him, "it's a calm night. Less than an hour across the Straits, and we'll be going straight into a naval dock. You're completely safe."

But all he did was frown. I decided to leave him to whatever physical discomfort he might suffer, and went to confirm arrangements with the boat commander.

We discussed details of the signal to send once we were out of Tanjah harbour, and in truth, I relaxed and enjoyed the sight of the city lights astern. Those sorts of things always look better from a distance; Tanjah is not a place I would visit for pleasure, but on a warm night, with a calm sea, I could easily convince myself that it looked like a grand and sophisticated city. Psychology has terms for such states of mind, dating back to the poetic roots of the discipline.

In any case, the lights of the Andalusian shore soon grew almost as impressive, although they were still more distant. I turned round to look that way, and began to wonder how much longer I would be assigned to this subject; interrogating our defector would normally be handled by specialists, but my skills had some relevance, and sometimes the Diwan likes to maintain continuity.

It was while I was distracted by that thought that I heard the boat commander swear. I turned to follow his gaze, and saw a third set of lights – belonging to a medium-sized craft, which was clearly on a course to cross our own.

"They appeared suddenly," I remarked, not yet reading the man's state of mind. "Should we turn aside to let them pass?"

"They appeared suddenly because they came up from underwater," the commander snapped, and then he left me gaping while he shouted out commands to his crew. The boat came about, but I realized that we would have little chance to out-run what I soon recognized as a military diving galleot.

I hurried back to the cabin, and found Kemal white with fear. "What is going on?" I demanded, "what's so special about this information that Angora would use a stupid tactic like this to keep it from us? And for that matter, if it's so valuable, why didn't they just send a few guard-dogs after you in Tanjah?"

"We are outside the safe space," he gabbled, "they couldn't find me in that part of the city for another two days – almost three. But out here, they have focus."

I decided that he was hysterical, and very possibly insane; I was only puzzled that I hadn't noticed the signs before. I could only guess that he must have been operating entirely within his own conception of rationality.

Which did not explain the shepherds' decision to send a suicide attack after him. It is hardly secret (or surprising) that both the Diwan of Security and the Moravid Palaces keep a sonar watch on the Straits; therefore, that galleot would, for a certainty, have been noticed, and it would soon be challenged, and either arrested or (if it chose to behave stupidly) sunk. Angora would subsequently have to make a lot of excuses. How-

ever, that left one large question; would the galleot be challenged in time to save us? I pointed to the briefcases, which were still chained to Kemal's wrists. "Can you summarize what's in those?" I asked, "give me something we can radio to Grenada?"

Kemal shook his head.

"Come on," I said, "it's a chance to save ourselves. If we can convince that galleot that the secrets are lost, they may decide it's not worth the risk to attack."

But Kemal still shook his head. "The historical study is too detailed," he said, "and I don't much understand the other part – the science – myself."

"You can tell me what they plan to do with all this material," I said, just as an explosion sounded a little way from the boat.

Kemal shivered. "They are planning to murder 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar," he said, almost inaudibly.

It took me a moment to recognize the formal, medieval name from the notes Kemal had shown me in Tanjah, and I did not then feel much better informed. "He is already a thousand years dead," I said.

"He lived long enough," Kemal answered. "He was strong – capable. Without him, your land will turn in on itself..."

Although I was still reading Kemal as sane, if frightened, I decided that he had slipped into terrified irrationality. "Please," I said, controlling my own voice to express all the calm I could project, "there must be something we could broadcast to dissuade them..."

"I'm sorry," Kemal interrupted, "There is nothing. They will want to stop as much of this as they can from reaching your masters."

I was about to argue further – to appeal to his honour, perhaps, given that we had made a deal – when there was another explosion, much nearer than the first. The galleot was irretrievably committed now, blasting us with its guns – light weapons by naval standards, but doubtless heavy enough to destroy a civilian craft like ours. I heard a couple of shots fired from astern on our boat; evidently, the commander had broken personal arms out from some secret compartment. But I also immediately heard the commander tell the men to save ammunition and stay under cover; the galleot was fully enclosed and armoured, gun positions and all, and our weapons would not harm it. They would only help us if the Ottomans sought to board.

I came out of the cabin in a crouch, and found one of the crewmen lying flat, rifle in hand. My first words to him were drowned out by a booming explosion that seemed to burst on the water bare yards from the boat, throwing up spray that blew over both of us; evidently, the galleot was finding our range.

"How long can we keep ahead of them?" I repeated.

The man looked uncertain. "There should be a ferry somewhere to the east," he said. "We're trying to cut over that way. The crazies won't want an audience. But that makes it easier for them to close."

There was another explosion, completely deafening, and my first thought was a foolish awareness that this one had thrown up no spray. Then I realized that this was because the shell had clipped the bow of the boat, splintering woodwork and destroying most of the glass in the craft's ports. I swore, and left the man holding

his rifle and cautiously trying to judge the galleot's position, while I crawled forward to find the commander in the wheel-house. Two more shells hit the water as I went; neither did any damage, but both were too close.

The commander had a vicious gash in his face, left by flying glass, but he was still alert and seeking to manoeuvre so as to throw off the Ottman's aim. We spoke for a few moments, as yet another shell missed us, but I could offer him nothing that would help. Then, as I paused, trying to think of any contribution that I could offer to our efforts to survive, another shot struck the boat near the waterline, just forward of the cabin.

I dashed back, forgetting the need for cover, and leapt through the hatch. The first thing that I saw was Kemal, who had been thrown against the wall of the cabin by the burst; the second was water, pouring through the damaged hull and already filling the cabin up to my knees.

I reached the defector, and examined him. He was concussed and unconscious, but so far as I could tell, not fatally hurt. I could not find his handcuff keys in the confusion and half-light, and it was entirely possible that the locks he had used had complex mechanisms that needed special operations to release; if I was going to save the briefcases, I would have to save him as well.

As I was dragging him through the hatch-way, another shell struck astern, sending up splinters that grazed my face. The galleot had us crippled now, and was firing methodically; that last shot had destroyed our engine. I wondered whether they would now board us. It seemed unlikely; they were all too evidently willing to destroy us completely, and I doubted that Kemal had escaped with the only copy of anything important.

As I hauled Kemal out of the cabin, looking for life-saving equipment as I came, I glanced across the water. The galleot was coming in close now, and I could see its twin forward guns swivelling to track us. Its name – *Mutual Loyalty Avenges Disloyalty* – and identifying codes were painted across its hull in blockish Modern Kufic script, and I reflexively memorized them.

Then there came the roar of heavy propellers, and a stutter of lighter guns. Explosive shells burst on the water, and then on the hull of the galleot – and then the pair of Andalusian aircraft passed overhead.

They came twisting back for another pass, and I wondered whether the galleot commander would dive, or whether his orders were indeed so strict that he would continue shelling us. In fact, neither turned out to be the case. I imagine that his instincts were those of a sailor, who, commanded to destroy a foe at sea, instinctively determines to obliterate the foe's vessel beyond hope of recovery – despite the fact that, in this case, his true objective was not the vessel, but that which it carried. His guns fell silent, and a massive bow-wave grew around the galleot as it gained speed.

By the time that the aircraft had come back around, their target was too close to us for them to fire safely, and they became spectators to this final assault. The impact shattered the boat completely, and the galleot ploughed on for 200 yards, leaving only fragments in its wake. Then I heard a hiss, which I only later realized was the galleot filling its dive-tanks; but by then, the flyers – as determined as the galleot commander, or perhaps simply vengeful – had decided that they could

now shoot once more. Their cannon had been more of a warning than a serious attack; on this pass, they fired short-range rockets, which holed the galleot three or four times. It sank in a few minutes.

I was watching all of this from closer than I liked, and hoping that no explosions would generate shockwaves in the water severe enough to kill. Fortunately, the rockets struck well above the galleot's waterline; it probably only sank because it had already started to dive. When the first ship – a ferry out of Tanjah – arrived half an hour later, it found me and Kemal, wearing the floatation-jackets that I had found in time, along with the boat's commander – a strong swimmer – and one of its crew, holding on to wooden wreckage. Two crew from the boat were killed; only one man from the galleot, one of the gun-crew, escaped its sinking. That one man's survival pleased me, as it gave Al-Andalus and Al-Morav many options for embarrassing the Ottmans.

I was able to assert myself aboard the ferry with some effect, much helped by the signals the captain had already received from Jabal Tariq, and I even managed to avoid too many questions about the briefcases chained to my "friend's" wrists.

Thus I found myself with time to sit and think, wrapped in a blanket in one of the ferry's cabins. In this time, I reflected on Kemal's claims.

Contrary to popular tales, training such as I have received cannot determine absolute truth. I merely have a fair chance of knowing whether a speaker believes that what is said is true, and of recognising the grosser forms of madness. We say that this science originally derived from the skills of poets as well as doctors – but I think that its founders also drew on the arts of simplest of popular story-tellers. And as they said, Allah Alone Knows Truth.

I formed the idea that I should tell Kemal that I accepted his story, and thereby gain his trust; although whatever he then told me might be the product of insanity, we could contrive to extract useful facts from it. However, I believe that I was deceiving myself at least as much as I hoped to deceive Kemal. I do not think that I entirely accepted the implications of his words, but I found them, and the information he had provided, strangely consistent.

No doubt many people aboard the ferry were startled by the small army of military ambulances and officials that met us when we reached Al-Andalus, but very soon, plenty of contradictory rumours were flying about collisions between Andalusian and Ottoman vessels in the Straits, and my own superiors left officials of the appropriate Diwans to exploit the situation.

I was led to the same ambulance as Kemal, which then rushed under escort to a secure hospital. Kemal was still nervous, although I judged that he was settling down. Then, after a few minutes, he came to a conclusion.

"I must tell you all that I can," he declared.

I looked around us; the vehicle held two medical assistants, and the partition between us and the driver had no effective sound-proofing. "Better to wait," I said, "there will be a conference arranged..."

"No." I saw that he was forming a strange determination. "The sooner I begin speaking, the better... I have no guaranteed safety now. The time and space

around Tanjah were all that was certain. If I do die, I want the best chance... That it won't be for nothing."

"Revenge?" I asked.

"More than that," he said, and he tried to say more, but I interrupted.

"I deduce that the guard-dogs have some kind of... science, which can observe the behaviour of individuals and other events in the recent past," I said, "that would explain a number of other recent successes that they have achieved. And I gather that you managed to find or create a blind spot for yourself – a safety zone, in Tanjah."

"Yes," Kemal agreed, "but that is only a first-order application of the theory."

"And a second-order application might serve to murder 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar?'"

Kemal nodded. "Who unified and strengthened Al-Andalus a thousand years ago. Without him – with his weak brother in charge, most likely – the tension between mercenary soldiers and subjects, in the face of Christian enemies..."

"Would be catastrophic," I finished for him. "Al-Andalus would fall."

"Be weakened," Kemal corrected, "enter irreversible decline. Its tradition of free thought would be lost, and it would never win an empire – or host a new age of learning."

"But why would your nation do such a thing?" I asked, mustering tones of calm patience. "If they change history thus thoroughly, surely the rise of the Ottmans, centuries later, would never happen."

Kemal coughed, half of a laugh. "Strangely enough, in some ways, history proves remarkably robust, when one examines it methodically – or empirically," he said, "the Ottmans would rise, and conquer, and would never face any annoying reforming movements. The shepherds believe that it would endure for many more centuries..."

I can say that Kemal spoke what he thought was truth that night, and that he showed no signs of blatant insanity. While he paused to draw breath and muster his thoughts, I sat silent. Then, I found a question that I thought struck to the heart of what he had said, whatever the roots of his tale.

"Even so, individuals who are alive this day would not exist in this other history," I said, "It would be a kind of – ultimate suicide. And all for the sake of a reasonable chance of success. Why should the shepherds elect to fight such a suicidal war?"

Kemal shook his head as if saddened by this question, although I was unsure whether the gesture was a sign of true unhappiness, or simply a rhetorical device. "You persist in misunderstanding the nature of the shepherds," he said, "all of you. You see them as like a band of Vandal kings in one of your historical epics – hypocritical tyrants, proclaiming a set of ideals purely in order to justify their own power."

"Do we?" I asked.

"But that is wrong, and I hoped that you – one who I know has seen these things at first hand – might understand that. They really do believe in the Omarite view of the world."

"But Omarism – the world that encompasses them – would be destroyed if they did what you say they are planning."

"Probably not entirely," he declared, and I caught a

note of true Omarite fanaticism there, albeit at second hand. "But I must make you and yours believe this absolutely. You must know that you are fighting to the death. Tell me how I may achieve this..."

"I do not know," I admitted.

"This is not a war in which one may sue for a decent peace," Kemal went on, "and the casualties cannot be kept low. There will be none, or we will all cease to be. If you elect not to give battle, you will all be swept away."

"No," I said. "Whatever happens, there will be casualties, and you will help determine them." I spoke quietly, trying to ensure that as few others as possible heard what I said, but I somehow felt that I had to speak now. If the "Key Points" of which Kemal's documents spoke truly exist – and if human beings can somehow sense them – then this was one, and I had to act instantly if I was to influence what would follow. "If we accept what you say, we will be obliged to be ruthless and swift, and some scientists and planners who you name will die."

I think that gave him pause, but only for a moment. "They have already accepted this, and more," he stated. "I will name who must die."

"I would guess that they may include friends of yours," I murmured.

"Perhaps..." I was not reducing Kemal's determination; rather, his ready-formed commitment was making him adopt a less flexible, more fanatical position in the face of counter-argument. I decided to leave matters there. "You have not grasped what I told you," he suddenly snarled. "The shepherds will sacrifice the existence of everyone – themselves and all of us – in the name of a few centuries, perhaps a millennium or two, of secure Ottoman glory. Or something with a similar name."

"And we can stop them?"

"We can..." I think that then he remembered his situation. "If I can survive long enough to convince your leaders that I am not mad."

"Very well," I nodded, "I will pass on what you say."

It was his turn to study my face. "I do not think that you really wish to fight this war," he said.

"Oh, I think that when we analyse your mathematical data, it will be consistent," I said quietly. "I think that we will fight this war."

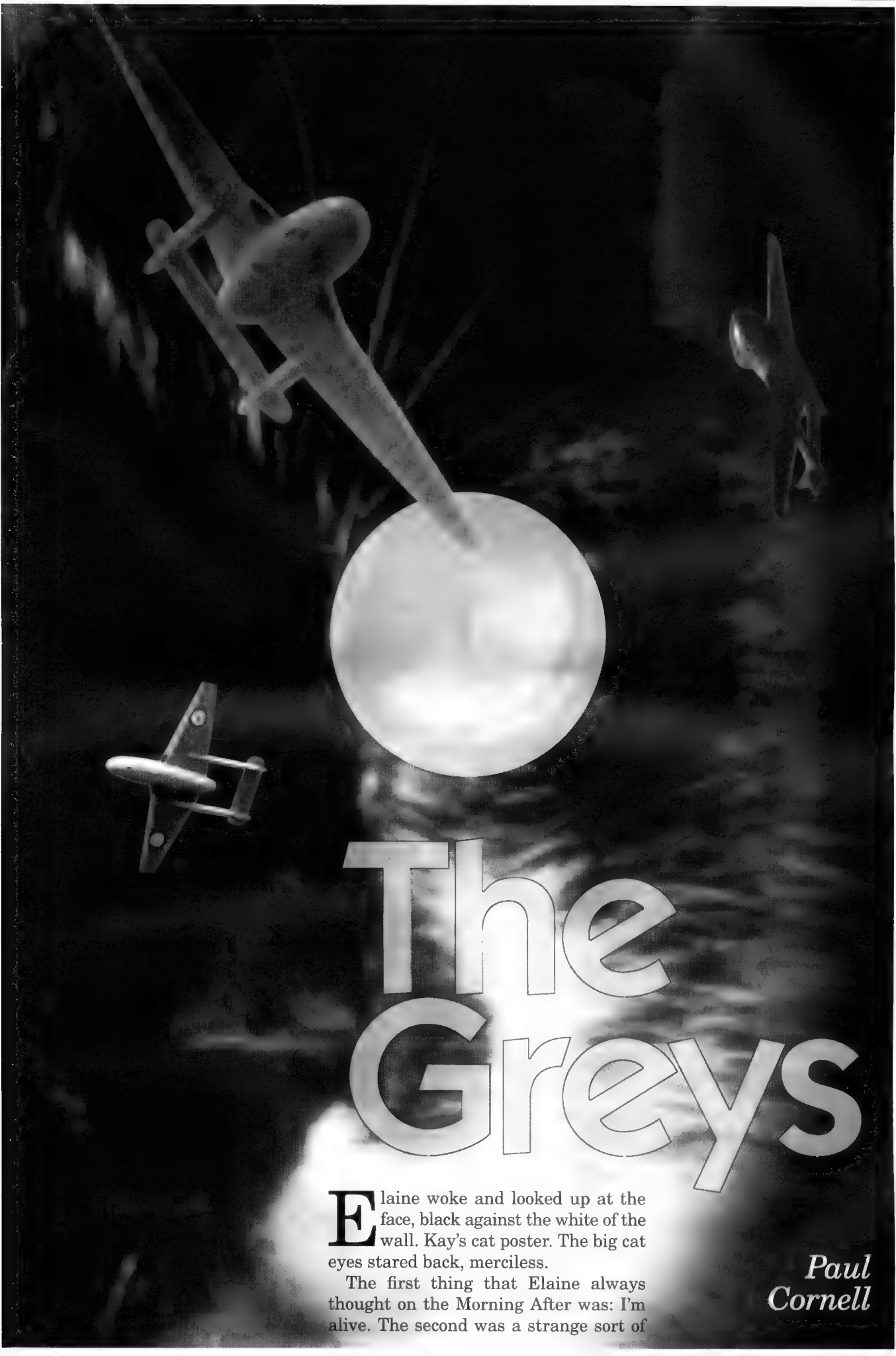
"That is enough," he stated, satisfied.

"However," I could not help but conclude, for my own benefit alone, "it is a fact about some wars, that if one is fighting them at all, one has already lost."

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**Phil Masters**, who has appeared in *Interzone* twice before (with "Platonic Solid" in #108 and "The Last Flight of Captain Bale" in #121), comments on the above story: "The survival of the Caliphate of al-Andalus was actually brought about by participants on the Internet newsgroup *soc.history.what-if*. Thanks are due to all involved in that discussion, including Ian Samuels, who saved the life of 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar, and Donald Tucker, for suggesting the Platonic totalitarianism that he named Omarism."





# The Greys

**E**laine woke and looked up at the face, black against the white of the wall. Kay's cat poster. The big cat eyes stared back, merciless.

The first thing that Elaine always thought on the Morning After was: I'm alive. The second was a strange sort of

*Paul  
Cornell*

brain sort-out thing, getting all the bits working and chucking out memories from dreams and all that. And then, just when the last dreams were filing out, some small and evil brain function would grab one of the more dangerous ones and yell: "But this one was real! Oh, yes!"

But not this morning. So that was good. Elaine still felt quite shattered though. "Why isn't that cat on your side of the room?" she asked.

"You said you liked it," a muffled Welsh voice replied from under the duvet.

"When?"

"Months ago, when I bought it." Kay poked her smoothly shaven head out and squinted at the poster. "Looked extreme, you said, which made me wonder, 'cos I thought it was cute. You gonna make breakfast then?"

"Speed for breakfast, speed for lunch and a square meal in the evening..." Elaine droned, and Kay joined in half way. Number of people who'd said that last night, it was good for a T-shirt.

"Fruit and fibre, ta. Is it a band or something said that?"

"It must have been. Somebody thin anyway."

"Go on then. I've got work today."

"All right." Elaine climbed out of bed and wandered into the kitchen. "Going out again tonight?" she shouted as she used the kettle to water the plants on the window sill.

"Where?"

"Little England."

"Yeah, I'll be the token working-class person."

"You aren't working-class, you take photos for a living." There was only a grunt in reply. Elaine filled the kettle again and pulled the curtain aside. The street below was sunlit; shopowners in shirtsleeves were putting their produce out. "I thought about going home to see Dad... I told him to ring."

"Great." Kay had pulled on a pair of bright bermudas and a *Soundgarden* T-shirt. She kissed Elaine's pyjama-clad shoulder and went to the fridge. "You'll get to hear all about his flying saucers again."

"Dad isn't some kind of nutter. He really saw one, back in the 1950s when you could do that and stay fashionable."

"Want me to come too?"

"I don't see why not. Dad used to be in the RAF, but he was the really odd one, the Richard Attenborough. He's really great."

"You never came out to him though."

"I'd moved out, it was never an issue. I honestly think he'd be okay if we just -"

"Sounds dodgy. I don't mind if you go on your own."

Elaine sighed. "So what's your assignment?"

"Demo. Right-to-life go to Parliament."

"A shoulderpads-and-helmet job."

"Yeah, but those are the best. What are you going to do today? No wait, I think I see it. You're gonna get a lump of rock and smash the fuck out of it with a chisel. Clonk clonk, oh dear there goes my thumb. Dangerous world for both of us, love."

Elaine grinned, supporting her head with her hand. "Love you."

Kay paused, about to pour milk over her cereal. "Yeah," she decided. "Oh yeah."

Elaine worked at her swan that afternoon, the radio playing in the background. The studio was full of a cool white light. It made the dust motes shine, and Elaine thought of school and lazy afternoons, the sound of her tapping like the sound of the classroom clock. Deep under the dustcovers and the chippings there'd be that smell of polished wooden floor too. Memory did well by smells, and the boards beneath her feet were probably contributing to the school vibe.

Every now and then, well, every hour, Elaine supposed, the radio would cut to the same report of distant yells and chants. She'd straighten up slightly then and wipe her brow, and be brought back to everyday thoughts.

Kay came back at teatime, bruised and smiling. "Sixteen rolls. At least ten good shots. Full-on truncheon action, and I was going 'Yes, go on policeman, do your job, protect society from these Christian perverts,' because I'm like that. I'm gonna have a bath. If Tom rings and says front page, give me a shout."

Tom did, Elaine did, and there was a satisfying splash from the bathroom as the shout woke Kay up.

They went to Little England that night. Elaine wore her black trouser suit and thin black tie, and Kay parodied her, much the same with a carnation in the buttonhole. "We look like a bloody synthesizer duo," she whispered as they stood in the queue that stretched round the Square.

"What should we call ourselves?"

"*Cottage Under Siege*. You stand out front like Edith Piaf and I've got a synth on a plinth and glare at everybody."

"The old wave of new wave." Elaine was enjoying herself. The swan was getting there, Kay was fine, and she'd scored in the queue, sniffing it up from an old sherbet dab box. "That was rather retro, wasn't it?"

"Eh?" Kay never took anything but Newky Brown.

"The sherbet box. Everything's like a reflection of something else these days. I mean, that Blur record is just Duran Duran. It's like everything turns round again and if you missed this particular childhood experience, I mean this particular one, say of being a Duranie, then you get to have another go at it. Isn't that great?"

Kay had been looking at other people, shuffling around a bit. "Here we go."

"No, no, what? I'm making sense still, aren't I Kay? I mean, it's early. It's cold but it's early. Hey -" she called to a bouncer who was wandering up the line counting heads. "Let us in, it's like fucking *Schindler's List* out here."

Little England was a warehouse, and on the nights of the Something Rotten club it was filled with less of a cross-section, more of a biopsy of London nightlife. Comfy sofas were thrown carefully into corners, and the DJ was crap, but so aggressive that nobody ever complained or staged a coup or anything.

Kay found some friends from the newspapers, and

introduced them to Elaine, but the girl with the quiff was too busy staring at the white lights that tumbled overhead, her pupils eclipsing her eyes even when she stared straight into the light.

She found somebody she liked on a sofa and told them about the Young's Slits experiment, which she'd read about in *New Scientist* the other week. If you fired light waves at a pair of slits, they splashed into each other and made lots of nice patterns, like two waves washing into the same harbour. If you fired individual photons, little bits of light, through them, they whizzed through one slit or another and went splat against the far wall. But, and this was the important bit – Elaine flexed her fingers in the air, trying to hold on to her point, and succeeded – if you kept a record of where the photons landed on the wall, made a chart of all those splats, the pattern it formed was just the same as the one made by the waves. And that meant that the photons, like a group of little stuntmen, knew what they were supposed to do to achieve the desired effect. The universe was, basically, a magic trick. But who was performing it? She left him with that thought.

She danced for a while, and joined in the yells when the music stopped with a screech of needle. Kay was with her often, usually trying to explain very slow and dull things that were really easy to understand. Elaine found some more sherbet, and this time they were offering a suck at some real liquorice with it.

The act that night was a mime duo, two persons of restricted growth, dressed as mice. They appeared out of a box with a bang and a flash, and danced madly to Pat Boone's version of "Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport." The crowd roared.

"Very sixties," Kay said in Elaine's ear.

"Very very very."

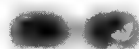
Kay got lost somewhere when the music started again, and Elaine was shocked by the cold night air as she went through a door. Kind of door where you push a bar to open it.

She took a few paces into the yard, walking beside a low wall. She followed it along for a while, turning a corner. There were music noises from behind her, the low boom of bass. Out here was just industrial stuff, lots of factories and disused estate things. Had somebody asked her to come out

here? She felt like she'd had an invitation.

There were white lights against the sky. They stretched her shadow out long.

And the ground was white also.



A dream: a team of child doctors were examining Elaine, telling her to be still and not to worry as they inserted a slim probe into her. "The baby will be fine," one of them said, tilting his cat head towards her.

He smelt of something terrible. Of sulphur.



Elaine woke on the pavement. She was alive, and... nothing embarrassing sprang to mind, because the processes had been mixed up. She could sort it out in the morning. It was still night.

She got to her feet, and walked up the steps of her house, finding the key in her pocket. All her money, too. Great. Good neighbourhood, where you could pass out in the street safely.

First time with the key, and into the hallway.

Kay ran out onto the landing. "Thank God, where have you been?" She was still dressed. She scampered downstairs.

"Little England, it was great. You should... weren't you there?"

"I was, but I lost you around two. I thought I'd find you when everybody went home, but –" she embraced her tightly. "Where have you been?"

"Seeing the doctor."

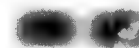
"Why, what's wrong?"

"Sorry. Didn't mean to frighten you. Love you. No, just an impression, dunno what I was doing."

"You're not hurt?"

"No, it's just... I'll explain in the morning."

Kay shook her head and led Elaine back upstairs. "I look forward to that, love."



The therapist folded his hands into a steeple. "So, have you ever experienced a loss of memory before?"

"Don't remember," Elaine deadpanned. They were sitting in two very low armchairs in a comfortable office, a pot of coffee brewing on the desk. The blinds had





turned the interior into a landscape of black and white lines, like a computer model.

"Ha ha ha. You can still make jokes, that's good. That's a human thing they can't take away from you."

Kay had found him in the back pages of *Time Out*. "James Ringwald, Missing Time Therapist. Regression, Hypnotism, Counselling. Find Out What Really Happened." She'd cut the advert out and blue-tacked it to the fridge. After Elaine had ignored it for the day, she'd dragged her into the kitchen and pointed at it, saying "look, look!"

This was all because of Elaine's immediate reaction upon waking that Sunday morning, which had been to burst into tears.

"So what happened?" Kay asked, holding her. Her tone of voice was neutral, the sound that Elaine associated with fights. Kay tended to listen to all your complaints carefully before exploding, going "And?" and "Oh really?" in exactly that uncommitted tone.

"I don't know..." sobbed Elaine. "I was speeding, and I left the place and... and then I don't know what happened."

"When did you leave? It can't have been until nearly two, and the club closes at three. Did you go off with somebody?"

"No. There wasn't anybody there when I left, but I met somebody outside. Lots of people. Or was that in a dream?"

"You didn't get home until five. I was on the verge of calling the police. Where did you go all that time?"

Elaine blew her nose on the pillow and wiped the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. "I have no idea. Three hours? My God, what happened to me?"

"So you didn't go off and sleep with somebody else?"

"Of course not, I wouldn't do that to you." Elaine sat up, stung by Kay's careful voice. She glanced to the window, and as she did, she caught sight of the cat poster.

She shuddered, and looked back to Kay. "Tell you what though, I might have been mauled by a cat."

Over the next few days, things got drizzly and drab. The weather got inside, and Kay would stamp home from a speech or an opening or something and open a can of soup, not going into the studio to see what Elaine was making. The swan was neglected in favour of cats, and they were set aside for catlike faces, and huge eyes. Elaine worked late, chiselling away at something she hadn't quite got, and Kay left her to it.

Then one day at the dinner table, Elaine had leapt up, scattering her salad. She gave a yelp of pain, a horrid doglike sound, and clutched at her bottom.

"What is it?" Kay was on her feet and to her in a second.

"Like... I got something shoved up me. Shit, I did get something shoved up me. The other night." She stared at Kay uncomprehendingly, her pupils flicking back and forth. "Why do I remember that now?"

"Do you want a doctor?"

"No..." Elaine sat down slowly. "It's gone."

Kay stared at her for ten seconds, biting her lip. Then: "Love... the other night... were you raped?"

"I don't know. I don't remember. Wish I did, I really wish I did. But somebody... definitely stuck something up me there."

"Can you remember a man?"

"No... children. Little children."

"Christ." Kay held her as she began to cry again. "What's happened to you?"

"Something very bad."

Hence the advert, hence the therapist.



He was an American, with big hands and a wrinkled, smile-cracked face. Elaine found him a little disturbing, because his care was paternal rather than chummy. It was like your Dad asking you what you've been up to, confession to a higher power rather than a friendly chat. The Charlton Heston Counselling Service.

"So there's no time in your early life that you can't account for? Think hard now."

"Well, everybody has stuff that they can't remember, don't they? Everybody has gaps."

Ringwald shook his head. "We forget things, sure we do. But if we ask friends what we were doing, or see an old diary, the memories come flooding back. No, what I'm talking about is quite different. What this is, what I believe you're suffering from, is the single most important psychological condition of the late 20th century. The defining condition, if you will, just as freedom of thought was in the Renaissance and nuclear hysteria was in the 50s. We call it Missing Time Syndrome."

"Good name."

"Ha ha ha. Yes, we think so."

"Who's this *we* you keep on about?" Elaine didn't want to keep interrupting, but she wasn't sure she wanted to get to the punchline either.

"Other therapists, specialists in the field. I'm sorry to say that it's become a growth industry in the States."

"Okay, so what happened to me?"

Ringwald spread his hands, leaning forward. "As yet, I have no idea. But if you'd allow me to introduce you to the process of hypnotic regression —"

"Erm..."

"I know, you feel insecure enough as it is, you're not sure if you can trust somebody else with your inner mind."

"That, and I want to know how much this is all going to cost."

"Ha ha ha."



Twenty quid a session was cheap, really, Elaine thought, and Kay didn't have to help out after all. In the first hypnotherapy session, Ringwald just taught her to relax, gradually screening out sounds and smells until she floated in warm limbo, thinking what a prat she was to start any of this stuff. If you were raped, you knew about it, didn't you? You knew, basically, what happened to you. Once she'd got some distance on it, and the blur of the drugs cleared up, then maybe it would all turn out to have a simple explanation.

When she opened her eyes, she yelled, and her sphincter contracted again. She put a hand to her mouth. "Oh no."

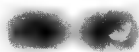
"What?" he leaned closer. "Did you remember something?"

"No, it was just... you hovering over me like that. It reminded me of the night."

Ringwald sat down quickly. "I'm very sorry, Elaine. I

didn't think that would happen. You obviously have a very deep trauma about this. Let's try a different approach. If I take you back to your childhood, how would you feel about that?"

"Fine. Yes, that would be fine."



It took several sessions before Ringwald went ahead with the regression, and every week Elaine reported her progress to Kay. Normally, it'd be like talking about a band or something, but one time, in the middle of a row, Kay burst out –

"It's your frigging hobby, isn't it, yourself? When I was a kid, we didn't have time to think about missing memories and how together we were and if the bogey man was coming to get us or not."

Elaine had run to her studio and grabbed the swan, thinking as she did it how over the top it was to do it. Well fine then, OTT it was, and Kay could have her that way or not at all.

Kay eventually came to her and apologized, and they made love. But Elaine started to think that maybe she had a point.



"I'm becoming a therapaholic," she told Ringwald. "Is that a new word, or have they and a group of their therapists gone on *Oprah*?"

Ringwald didn't laugh. "It's a recognized condition."

"Isn't there anything that's not a recognized condition?"

"Poverty?"

"Goodness, a radical joke. I didn't think you had it in you."

"I have hidden depths."

"Wonderful, I've consulted an expert."

Ringwald sat beside the couch. Summer, Elaine suddenly thought, was rather passing her by. Thanks to these sessions, she was white. "Today we'll go back, if you want. Check out the stuff of childhood. You've told me about your old bedroom. Shall we try and find out why you were afraid to sleep in it?"

"Okay."

He counted her back, telling her that as she was feeling more relaxed, she was feeling more secure, and as she was feeling more secure, she was feeling more able to remember, and that as...

"How old are you?" he asked.

Without it sounding stupid to Elaine, she replied: "Eleven."

She had eleven and adulthood at once, as if a book was open at this familiar old page.

"Why were you afraid to sleep in your own room, Elaine?"

"Because of the monsters."

"And where are they?"

"Everywhere. Outside."

"Not inside? Inside the house?"

"There are monsters that look in through the cracks in my curtains at night."

"What do they look like?"

"I don't want to look up and see them."

"Where's your Dad?"

"He's at the end of the bed, tucking me in."

"Does he get into bed with you?"

"No, that was before."

"What was before?"

"We sleep in the same bed since Mummy died. Daddy cuddles me."

"I see. Let's move on. Remember a happy time that had something sad about it."

She could feel hot sun on her skin.

"Where are you?"

"West Wittering, in Sussex. I'm at an airshow."

"Is your father there?"

"Yes. He's pointing up. Oh! There they go! That's frightening!"

Three jets had leapt up over the crowd, turning heads, and screamed from one horizon to the other.

"Vampires," said Elaine and her Dad at once.

"I'm sorry?"

"Vampire jets, they're night fighters. Daddy flew one. Oh, I'm crying. I don't want to cry, because it was only the noise. I'm not scared, it was just the noise. Daddy's leading me away."

"Where's he taking you?"

"Back to the car."

"Where's Mummy?"

"She's dead, stupid. Daddy told me that she had gone on a long journey, which means she's dead. We're standing in front of the car. He's giving me a string."

"A string? A rope? What's he giving you, honey?"

Elaine grinned. "Guess."

"No, I can't guess, you must tell me."

"You're so eager to know, so you can guess."

"Okay, is it a big rope?"

"No, a thin one. All right, it's a balloon. He's given me a balloon, to make up for us going home because I'm crying. He really wants to stay, but I spoiled it for him."

"Is he telling you this?"

"No, but that's what he feels. If Mummy was alive, she could take care of me and he could watch his aeroplanes. He's given me a balloon to make up for all of that."

"What sort of balloon is it?"

"It's a big silver-foil job, very futuristic." She pronounced the last word in syllables, enjoying speaking. "He's driving along in the car, and I let it bounce against the ceiling, and it's good, but it doesn't stop me crying. We're stopping now, and getting out."

"Is it dark?"

"No, it's daytime. We're parking in the caravan site. I get out of the car, and walk to the caravan, and –"

"Is he getting into the caravan with you?"

"No, wait, this is the important bit. I think for a second that a balloon is the sort of thing that you can let go of and it'll stay on the ground and you can pick it up again. I let go of the balloon to reach for the caravan door handle. Oh no! I snatch for the string, but it's already gone, on its way up. It's flying away from me, up into the sky!" Elaine's voice adopted a low, gentle quality. "Oh dear, it's off to balloonland."

"Is that what he said?"

"Yes! And there is no balloonland! Look at it, flying away up against the sun!"

"And then what happened?"

"No, this is the important bit, the balloon against the sun!"

"Is that all this memory is about?"

"Isn't that enough?"



Elaine held Kay close that night.

"I can see the way this is going," Kay murmured, stroking her hair. "What he's saying is, you were abused by your Dad."

"He's not saying anything. But yeah, that's what it's starting to look like."

"Do you remember that?"

"No, not at all. But Ringwald says that's the whole point, that missing time covers up all the repressed horrors in our lives. When I was speeding, I actually broke through and remembered some of that childhood abuse. The shock was so much that I vegged out for a few hours."

"I'll twat him one," Kay muttered. "If he did anything to you —"

"I don't remember anything, so don't you twat him anything. If you ever meet him."

"What, like next weekend?"

"What?"

"Next weekend. He called to ask if you were coming over, and I said we both were. If I'd known he was a child molester, I'd probably have turned the offer down, like. Not a polite excuse now though, is it?"



The summer of 1952. RAF Hamelin, West Sussex. It was a balmy evening, the sunset of an hour ago still giving the sky the gleaming quality of a photographic negative. Somebody had brought the cards out from the mess.

Squadron Leader Rex Davies sat with the five other members of the Battle Flight on deckchairs, around a white garden table that they'd stolen from The Beaufort in town.

Alec Bedser, Davies' navigator, was trying to explain Contract Bridge to the rest of the flight, but he wasn't having much success. The purpose of the Battle Flight was to take up three jet fighters in the event of any unanticipated intrusion into British airspace. In the daytime, it would be George Watts and his Hunters. At night it was Davies and the Vampires.

The Hunter was slightly newer kit than the Vampire, but the latter still had the edge at night because of its better radar. The navigator sat beside the pilot, as well, rather than behind him, and that gave you two cracks of the whip at a visual contact.

Davies remembered aircraft with propellers. He'd been a Mosquito pilot towards the end of the war, when you could fly over occupied France without anybody even bothering to shoot at you. The Cold War felt sort of the same,

an excuse for flashing the latest weapons around. They'd overcome the great evil of the century, and it wasn't the way of good stories to have to face another one so soon. George's Dad had been a Communist in the 30s, and admitting that had got George taken up before several committees.

"How's the old girl?" he asked Bedser.

"Oh, fair enough sir. Lucy's settled down quite well in the married quarters, and we've said that we'll be trying for children."

"Trying's the fun bit, Alec, you mark my words."

Across the grass of the airfield, a siren sounded. "Scramble Battle Flight," announced the tannoy calmly.

Scattering cards, books and pipes, the airmen sprinted for the nearby jeep. They were already in their pressure suits. By the time the jeep arrived at the jets, the engines had been started, engineers diving aside with electrical connectors in their hands. It always felt good, for Davies, to get up and fly again. He wouldn't be able to do it much longer and, if he was honest with himself, it was good to have all the excitement of combat flying and none of the risk. In 18 intercepts that year, not a single combat had taken place. What usually happened was that the Vampires climbed to high altitude, found the Soviet Bear reconnaissance aircraft that had lumbered carefully into their airspace and warned them away with a bit of pidgin Russian over the radio. The Russian aircrews often waved, grateful to turn their huge, prop-driven birds homeward again.

The jeep came to a halt, and Davies and Bedser dashed for the lead aircraft, up the steps and into their seats. As the steps were pulled away, they made the important three connections: radio, air-line, and webbing, and Bedser pulled the canopy down while Davies unlocked the brakes. Then they were rushing along the runway, gathering speed until they lifted off. Wheels up, radar working. The night sky welcomed them again.

They were told to climb to 10,000 feet, not really high enough for a Bear, and proceed South to intercept a target over the English Channel. Soon they were within radar range, and Bedser peered down at his scope. "Here's fun, sir. He's a small one, coming in low from the continent. Wonder the French didn't spot him."

"Probably somebody in a light plane, didn't file a flight plan."

"No..." Davies could hear the interest in Bedser's voice even over the crackle of the intercom. "No, he's going bloody fast. Christ, that's got to be a fake echo. Heads up, should have

visual contact any moment, if there's anything to see."

Up ahead, a bright star was shining, growing brighter. "He's showing lights," Davies almost laughed. "What's he up to?" One of the wingmen buzzed in his ear. "Yes, we see it too. It's the fairy on top of the bloody —"

"Sir!" Bedser shouted. Davies hauled the stick to one





side as a ball of brilliant light shot past.

"Break formation, break formation," Davies shouted, pulling the aircraft round in a long turn. "V6 to Hamelin Tower, we have engaged the enemy –"

"That wasn't a missile sir, that was him!" Bedser yelled, twisting in his seat to see if he could catch a glimpse. "What do you reckon, is that one of the new Foxtrots?"

"The hell it is –" Davies paused as a new message crackled in his ear. "They want us to engage, Alec. Whatever that is, it's over our soil and the Air Ministry'll want it. Give me a lock so I can put a missile on it."

Bedser looked down at the radar again, and quickly gave Davies a new course.

"And now he's – my God, he's stopped, sir."

"Stopped? That wasn't a helicopter, was it?"

"Skip, no jet in service goes that fast. He was through the sound barrier, I'm sure, and now he's just sitting there. What do you reckon?" There was an expectant edge to Bedser's voice.

"What, you reckon it's the Martians then, Alec?"

"Better be, sir. If it's the Russians we're bugged."

The Vampires had turned to head back towards the object's new position. The new star shone ahead, a solid ball of white fire. Colours flickered about it, but no structure could be seen. No wings, tail, metal or glass, and nowhere inside this chariot that had swept so low was there ever going to be a man, bundled up with his lifeline and his goggles.

"One minute to range sir," there was a ping from Bedser's screen, and a corresponding buzz from the tower. "That's Amanda, Amanda, we're locked, do we have a go at him?"

"Wait." Davies spun the radio tuner in his gloved hand, listening for anything he didn't recognize. Maybe he heard a distant whine, he was never sure. "This is RAF Hamelin Battle Flight to unidentified craft, do you copy? You're over British airspace, lads. Don't just sit there, why not pop in for tea?"

"Sir, 30 seconds –"

"We kicked out the Nazis, we're sorting ourselves out. You could help a bit, let everyone know that there's something beyond their own little philosophy, what? Go on, what do you say?"

"Ten seconds," Bedser called.

"Beautiful bird you have there," Davies muttered. Then, with more resolution: "Hope I get a test drive." "Sir –"

"Gun camera." Davies flicked open the trigger on the joystick, and held it down, the noise of the exposures filling the cockpit. The Vampires shot over the glowing sphere.

Bedser looked over his shoulder. "Lock lost. When they impound your bollocks, I'll say you did the right thing,

skip." There came a sudden cacophony from the tower, and the navigator spun back to his instruments. "And there he fucking goes! Straight up... I've lost him... base has got him... and he's gone. Little beauty."

"My thoughts exactly," Davies laughed, letting out a great breath.

The debriefing was a long and torturous affair, with promises of another interview the following night by the War Ministry chaps already on their way down from Whitehall. The gun-camera film was taken away for processing. Davies' Wing Commander denied actually ordering an engagement, claiming that he'd merely reacted to Davies' report of one taking place.

Just before it closed, Bedser and Davies got to the bar for a pint. Davies leaned back in his chair, and wiped the foam from his moustache. "Well, Alec, what a wonderful world these children of ours are going to inherit."

"Right. They'll be living with spacemen, and voting for who gets to be MP for the Earth. Where do you think they're from, skip?"

"Not Mars. Not anywhere in the solar system, I should think. A nearby star. Maybe they've heard our radio transmissions, or perhaps they've been watching us, and think that we're ready to join

their club. They're good chaps, anyway, we know that. They could have blasted us out of the sky tonight."

"Well, now they know that we're good chaps too, right skip?"

"Yes..." Davies smiled and downed his pint. "And amen to that."



Elaine turned the little Fiat Panda off the A4 and into the side road that led off in the direction of Devizes. The drive out to the M25 and West would normally have been easy, but she and Kay had been arguing all the way.

Initially, the topic had been whether Kay should or should not twat Elaine's Dad. Then it had become whether Kay was good enough for Elaine's Dad, then whether they should admit to being more than good friends and if not, why not, and maybe Kay should twat him anyway. It all came down to: was Elaine sure about the vague stuff that Ringwald had found in her past?

Elaine stopped the car on a grass verge and opened the sun roof. The lush greenery of the Wiltshire countryside was doing its best to make her happy in spite of everything, and she wanted to encourage it. "No, I'm not sure of any of it, and I don't know what I'm going to say to Dad about it, if anything. I don't even know how I'm going to react when I see him. What if I flip out and start screaming at him in front of the neighbours?"

"Then he'll deserve it."

"I really love your ethics, Kay, they're so simple. If Kay suspects wrongdoing, twatting follows like summer follows spring. And ask yourself, should we be naming an act of violence after the female genitals? Should we fuck."

"Should we fuck? Another good question."

"Shut up. You're not clever so don't try it out. The answers –" she raised a finger to stop Kay interrupting, "the answers to all your questions are these: you are good enough to show off to Dad because I still love you both –"

"In different ways."

"Yes, I should bloody hope in different ways, and therefore you shall not twat him, and, yes, if the topic arises in conversation we will indeed tell him that we're a pair of screaming lesbians, okay?"

Kay was smiling a rare and beautiful smile at her. "That was wonderful. Thank you."

Elaine started the car again. "You're welcome."

They drove down through the little hamlet of Calstone, and negotiated farm buildings and muddy tracks before coming to a turn that gave an unobscured view of the downs.

"Hey," Kay pointed, "you've got a white horse."

"Yes, but its not an ancient one. This chap in Victorian times stood on top of Cherhill hill and shouted out instructions to his workers. That's why the horse is the only one done in perspective."

"Great. And that stone column's a war memorial, right?"

"Yeah. It also divides the land between a couple of landowners. I went to school with the daughter of one of them."

"Oh my God, posh school stories."

"She used to eat glue rather than sniff it. Paint, too. Gorgeous, mind you, but a bit useless. My tastes were obviously fixed from an early age."

Kay missed it completely, still craning her neck out of the window to get a look at the downs. She ducked past tree branches and avoided other vehicles with her head as the Panda sped down the sun-dappled roads. "Can we go up to that cornfield with a crop circle in it?"

"Yeah, of course we can. I was going to suggest it, but I thought you wouldn't be into it. Okay now, here we are..." She swung the car round a final oak-fringed turn, and whizzed through a little gateway into a gravelled drive. When they came to a halt, Elaine switched off the engine, but didn't try to undo her seatbelt.

"Big place..." Kay nodded at the house. It was an old Georgian building, and not actually very big, but the idea of living in anything like that made Kay feel small. She did up the lace that had come undone on her Doc Marten. "You going to ring the doorbell then?"

"Give me a minute, get myself psyched up."

"Okay then, I'll do it." Kay hopped out of the car and crunched her way up to the door, before leaning lengthily and dramatically on the doorbell in a way which reminded Elaine of Oliver Hardy. She got out of the car, not wanting to be sitting there when Dad opened the door.

When she looked up from locking the vehicle, there he was.

He was shaking Kay warmly by the hand, his grey-moustached mouth smiling broadly and openly. When he looked up at her, his eyes were full of pleasure.

So she didn't scream in front of the neighbours, not that any of them could have seen what was going on

behind the rows of neat conifers that surrounded the house. She went to him and kissed him on the cheek. "Hi Dad, this is Kay."

"We've met on the phone. I'm glad you found such a charming flatmate, Lainey." The old man wrapped an arm around his daughter's shoulder, not noticing a moment of reluctance on her part, and waved Kay into the house. "Do call me Rex. Dinner's on. Curry okay?"

Curry was the only meal Rex Davies could make when he married his wife. After she died, he learned to cook for himself and his daughter, but curry was still his special dish, the one he turned out for occasions.

Kay and Elaine sat at the big wooden table in the kitchen, looking at each other uncomfortably while the old man banged about with pans and plates. "What do you think of him?" Elaine whispered.

"I don't know. He hasn't said anything stupid about the way I look."

Rex deposited a bottle and three glasses on the table. "Open that for me, would you, Kay? South African. Cheap as anything these days."

Kay grabbed the corkscrew and started vigorously twisting. "These days? Did you used to buy it then?"

"Good Lord, no! Wouldn't have their fruit in the house either. Glad I lived to eat Cape again." He made questioning eye contact with Elaine before going back to the cooker.

Kay stared after him. "Can I marry him?"

"Oh, an ideal match..." Elaine muttered, grabbing the bottle off her and finishing the cork job. "Don't you want to twat him any more?"

"Well, I've met him now, haven't I?"

"So I walked into what I thought was the life class, took off my dressing gown, picked up the apple and stood there with it. Took five minutes before the teacher came over and said 'You have the wrong room, Mr Davies. This is still life.'"

"I don't believe a word of it," Elaine flicked a few drops of condensation off the end of her quiff. The kitchen had filled up with the warmth of curry and cooking. She was trying hard to fit the version of Dad she'd got from her therapy with this beautiful man she remembered. "Dad," she began suddenly, and watched Kay sit up at the change in her voice, "when I was little, do you remember me losing a balloon at an air display?"

"I certainly do. You howled as though it was the most important thing in the world."

"And why is it that I hated sleeping in my bedroom, that when I came home from university I'd sleep in the lounge with a chair up against the door?"

"I've never worked that one out. I always thought –"

"And why is it I remember sleeping in your bed after Mum died? I'd have been a bit old, wouldn't I? And what about that object I remember playing with, no, let's name it, I used to have a dildo in my toy box! What the hell was going on?"

Rex stood up, and put his glass down on the table. "It's getting late," he said, his eyes set on some invisible horizon, "you know where everything is. Goodnight."

"Dad!" Elaine leapt to her feet as he left, but found

that Kay had a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"Sorry," she said after a moment, letting go. "I just don't think you should... oh, I don't know. Where are we going to sleep?"



The old chair propped just as neatly under the lounge doorhandle as it ever had.

"You needn't do that, eh?" Kay was floundering. Since her outburst in the kitchen, Elaine had been silent, burning with anger but unable to say a thing. They'd gathered blankets and pillows from a cupboard without a word, and Elaine had rushed along the hall into the lounge, nearly shutting Kay out of her old safe place. "I'm here, and he's not gonna —"

"He's not going to what? Do what he did when I was little?"

"Well, no, he's not."

"You're the one who wanted to kill him. Now, just because you think he's nice —"

Something snapped inside Kay. She grabbed Elaine by the shoulders and pulled her roughly to her. "If you want me to, I will honestly cut your father's throat. Just ask. But —" she held up a finger, silencing Elaine, "if you're going to be sorry about that for a moment afterwards, don't blame me."

Elaine sagged. "It's my Dad, Kay. It's Dad. How could he do it?"

Kay held her tight. "All come rushing back, has it?" "No."

"Well then, some of it might not be true, which is why you two need to actually talk about it rather than fly off the handle straight away. In the morning, I'll piss off and leave you to it."

"No."

"Yes. Now come on, let's see if this sofa will fit two of us."



Elaine did sleep, eventually, and appreciated Kay's closeness. There was a terrible hole inside of her.

The noise woke her at two a.m., by the grandfather clock. She looked quickly around the room, checking the door as she had on many similar occasions of waking. The chair was still in place. Kay was snoring. The lounge was full of ordinary things, ornaments that Elaine had been used to since she was a child. But memories weren't comforting any more.

Had there been a noise?

It came again. A tap at the window. Three knocks.

She rolled off the sofa and walked to the window, keeping her eye on the curtains as if they were going to move. She made sure her shadow didn't cross the window. She wanted to see what was outside: be it Dad, or some childhood monster, or a little doctor with the eyes of a cat.

She grasped the bottom of the curtains.

And flung them wide open.

A blond young man in a lumberjack shirt was standing there, his mouth open in amazement. His knuckle was poised at the window, about to knock again. "Shit," Elaine lip-read.

"You —" Elaine opened her own mouth, and shouted: "Kay!"

Kay leapt upright from the sofa. "What? What?!"

"There's a man outside! French windows!" Elaine pulled some keys from a vase. Fumbling with them, she unlocked the windows. Kay was pulling on her boots.

Shouts were coming from outside. Kay and Elaine dashed out into the night, only to run straight into another boy, carrying a pile of logs. The logs went everywhere, and the boy sprinted off. Kay chased off after him. The blond boy was standing at the end of the drive, watching as his mate weaved to avoid Kay's outstretched hands. In her nightie and Docs she was quite a sight.

Elaine stared at the blond boy. It obviously hadn't been him that had been prowling the garden when she was a child. He was too young. But it had been somebody like him. Somebody ordinary.

Kay leapt at the second boy and crumpled him into a heap on the lawn. The blond one turned and ran.

"Caught this one in the garage." Rex pushed another boy round the corner at the point of a spade. "Call the police please, Lainey. Then we'll talk." As Elaine ran inside, he glanced down at Kay, who had wrestled her opponent into a painful sort of knot. "I haven't done anything untoward with Elaine, you know," he told her.

"That's okay," Kay grunted. "I have."



They sat at the kitchen table, after the police had gone, and Rex poured them each a cup of hot chocolate. "I'm sorry about that," he began. "Quite often lately we've had lads stealing things, but I was never able to catch them at it before. As I was going to say earlier, I've often thought that the frequency of thieving around here, and this goes back to the farming families that live nearby, might have had something to do with your problems with the back bedroom. They were trying to scare you tonight, maybe they always have done."

"That's a comforting thought," Elaine muttered, still with a bit of edge to her voice. "Go on then, what about the rest of it?"

"Well, that's where it gets rather blurred. I couldn't just look you in the eye and say that nothing happened, because... no wait, hear me out. After your Mum died, we did share a bed for a long time." Rex ran a hand back through his thinning hair. "I sent you back to your own room after I woke up one night and found that I'd started to... well, kiss your hair, embrace you, all that sort of thing. Nothing advanced, nothing..." He was blushing red, and turned away. "Nothing very modern. What I used to do when I was asleep with Peg. But I can't deny that... all that business must have been in the back of my mind. I read up on the subject, and, well, I still feel extremely guilty. Probably you felt a bit of that when I insisted you reinhabit your room, and it sort of... rubbed off to make you insecure. Christ, I've done a pretty poor job."

Elaine was shocked to hear her Dad swear. "And the dildo?"

"Nothing to do with you, actually. Lady friend, when you were at school. There were a few. Didn't find it for days, until I saw it in the back of one of your dumper trucks. You were going to launch it over the hedge as a rocket, so let's be thankful for small mercies."

Kay held up her hands. "A row of perfect sixes."



Elaine hugged her father, but he took a step back. "It's not as simple as that though, is it? It doesn't come down to whether I did something or not. It's the intention. And, on a couple of those nights, the intention was there. If this therapy of yours has found that out, well, I suppose it's for the best. Obviously, you won't want to come back here any more, and I can't say I blame you, but –"

"Don't talk about it any more. Of course I want to see you. I love you, Dad."

Rex let her embrace him, finally. He let out a long sigh. "So what did this witchdoctor do for you? Apart from implicating me?"

"He regressed me back to when I was a kid."

"Why?"

"Because one night when I was... very drunk... I lost three hours of memory. I can't account for them, and ever since... I've had strange half-memories, about being examined by a bunch of doctors. And cats' eyes bother me. And I keep having... well, pains, like I've had something put inside me. Dad?"

Rex was shaking. He put a palm down onto the table and supported himself. "Tell me you read this in a book somewhere and thought it'd be fun to pretend it happened to you."

"I couldn't lie to you like that. Not after tonight."

Kay put a steady hand on Rex's shoulder. "What's it all about, then?"

"I'll show you." Rex straightened up. "It's something I've been increasingly concerned about. Something which is, again, very modern."



Rex led the way into his study, and closed the door behind them. Kay went immediately to the plastic model of a flying saucer that hung from the ceiling by string. "Hey, great. What movie is it out of?"

"It's out of real life, believe it or not."

"Oh yeah, I forgot. You're a UFO... erm, enthusiast."

"Dad saw a flying saucer when he was in the RAF," Elaine muttered, playing with the spines of some of the books on the shelves. She didn't like the way this was going at all. "I gather that his version of missing time is that I was kidnapped by aliens."

"Now, wait, listen to me." Rex raised his hands carefully, still clearly disturbed. "Your story does sound remarkably similar to a lot of others, you know. And I didn't see a flying saucer, I nearly got into a dog-fight with a ball of light, as did my colleagues. I'd say it's all on record, but I get the feeling that soon after we talked to the War Office about the incident, those records would have vanished. It was serious stuff then, back in the fifties, a fit subject for young airmen to discuss. Nothing actually silly, you know, about the idea of alien scouts checking us out. But now, like virtually everything else, it seems to have become a form of religion. And that faith has, of late, become rather disturbing. There are people who've gone through similar experiences to yours, mates of mine, Lainey, who you could meet."

"I don't know, Dad. I'm not sure that I want to share your hobby..."

"Hobby be damned, from where I stand this is actually about real things happening in the real world. You know, when people met aliens in the 60s and 70s, they met all

sorts of things: things with tentacles, robots, your classic little green man. Mostly in America, and all rather silly. However, more and more these days, and recently, almost exclusively, they've met these." He pulled a picture from behind a wardrobe. It was a painting of a short, grey-skinned skeletal figure, with an outsize head and dark, pupil-less eyes.

"Oh shit... shit shit shit..." Elaine turned aside.

"Will you at least talk to one friend of mine?"

"Yeah, just put that thing away. I'm going to bed." She left the room quickly.

"You really believe in this stuff?" Kay asked.

"Yes. I've seen one of the craft. After that, you can't help but think there's something to it."

"You're not a child molester who's looking for a great alibi or anything?"

"No. But I am a man who's looked rather too far into the themes that keep the 20th century going. These little bastards have become so everyday, so common-ordinary –" Rex shuddered, indicating the portrait of the alien, "that they've actually acquired a name. They're called the Greys. Apt, isn't it?"

After a moment, Kay nodded. "You ever see any, then?"

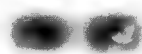
"Nothing but Greys sometimes. Do you love my daughter?" The question had come with a false lack of emphasis.

"Yeah. Horribly. I won't let anything happen to her."

"Then I'm sure nothing will." They shook hands.

"You're really great about us. Thanks."

"Kay," Rex sighed. "I believe in men from outer space. I can accept most things."



"Okay, so how's this for a theory..." Kay said. They were sitting at the centre of a corn circle, a picnic cloth spread out between them. "This circular depression is the work of the Young Farmers, right?"

Elaine looked at her. "I don't know why you keep going on and on about this stuff..."

"So how about all the other weird and mysterious things are their fault too? The Loch Ness monster is a submarine manned by Scottish Young Farmers, who periodically sail down to the Bermuda Triangle and sink a few ships. They all dress up as male witches –"

"Warlocks."

"No, I'm serious, and your offhand glimpse of one on a camping holiday is enough to make you believe in Big-foot. They're the ones who let the pumas out onto Dartmoor and who keep every single folk belief in the British Isles going."

"So they're also a bunch of fairies?"

"You said it. And you're smiling." Kay grabbed Elaine and wrestled her to the ground. "That's good to see after all this stuff."

"Well, my Dad has flipped, hasn't he? Which is harder to believe, child abuse or aliens?"

"Well, in this case –"

"Don't say it. Maybe it's nothing at all. Maybe I just had a hallucination, not unlikely since I was stoned out of my mind at the time. Maybe I just get lots of bad dreams. Maybe I didn't see lights in the sky before I fell over."

"Did you?"

"Shit, didn't I tell you that? Well it's all bullshit."

"You seemed to have a big reaction to that alien picture."

"Well, it's a scary picture. Hey, you know what I could do with?"

"Not in the middle of a field, dear."

"Breakfast."

Kay raised an eyebrow, glancing at the empty picnic hamper. "But – oh no, this is the countryside, who are you gonna score off here?"

"We'll find somebody. Maybe we could go to Marlborough."

"That's where that friend of your Dad lives. The one he wants you to see."

"Is it? Oh well, maybe Swindon then. Whatever."

"If you get wrecked again, what are you going to meet this time?"

"Maybe a young farmer."

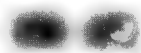
"Now that is a fairy story."



They drove out to Marlborough, taking a detour past the Avebury stone circle on the way. "Who built that?" asked Kay. "Aliens?"

"No, clever people," Elaine replied.

Then they chorused: "No, Young Farmers."



Marlborough hadn't changed much since Elaine had last seen it. In summer, there weren't the schoolboys with *Room With A View* fringes that she'd promised to show Kay, but there was still the college itself, the little bridge over the road, and the tea-shops. Elaine searched for one particular tea-shop, and found it, hoping that an old friend still hung around there. She was right. He was licking a roll-up, massaging the scalp of his guide dog with his foot. The dog, a giant golden Labrador, seemed to be enjoying it.

"Ken," Elaine smiled, bending down to pat the dog.

"Lainey Davies?! My God, what happened to you?" The blind man reached out and touched her hair, and for a second Kay thought he was going to transfer his foot to her scalp. "Apart from cutting all your hair off?"

"I went to London. Found other sources."

"Ah, well, things have been bad lately."

"That's what you always said."

"Who's your friend?" He jerked his head in Kay's direction.

"Ken, this is Kay Hobson," Elaine told him, placing his hand on Kay's.

"How do you know I'm not WPC Kay Hobson?"

"Nah, you'd smell like a WPC. I know what Lainey wants. What are you after?"

"Not pharmaceuticals. I'm looking for aliens." Kay ignored the look of disgust that Elaine flashed her. "Little grey aliens."

"Can do. Here." His hand flashed inside his jacket, and returned with a plastic pouch. "DMT. One each, fifty quid."

"Thirty," Elaine replied.

"Forty."

"Wait, wait –" Kay glanced around, worried about the old ladies who were eating their scones at the next table. "What do you mean, can do? What is this stuff?"

"DMT. You remember when EMF and The Orb and all of them pop stars was touring Europe and talking about meeting aliens? EMF even did a song about it –"

"They're Here, d'you mean?" asked Kay.

"Might have been, don't ask me about pop music. Anyhow, no wonder they were seeing 'em, because this was what they were taking. It puts you in touch with DLEs."

"So EMF on DMT met DLEs?" asked Elaine, quickly adding to a passing waitress: "Three teas, please."

"DLEs," continued Ken, "are Dream-Living Entities. They may be the gods themselves, sentient beings in charge of various facets of human existence. They may be icons, existing in the collective unconscious of all humanity. Or they may simply be drug-induced phantoms. Some of them appear, so we are told, as small grey men. Whatever they are –"

"Three teas," the waitress returned with a tray.

Ken waited until she was out of range once more. "This stuff gives you an audience with them. On a plate."



"Grey tablets," Elaine moaned, looking at the plastic packet that Ken had sold to them. "Why is everything about these things grey?"

"They're the aliens of Major's Britain," suggested Kay.

"No, that's our job." They were heading back to the car, so Kay stopped.

"Wait. What about this friend of your Dad's?"

"I don't want to meet her."

"So you're willing to go and have summit talks with the little gits, but you aren't willing to talk to a fellow sufferer?"

"That's exactly it. These are drugs, I understand drugs. If all these things are is flashbacks I'll sleep easier tonight."

"Well, I note that there are two tablets in that packet. Were you planning to pop both yourself?"

"Yes."

"Liar. And you're going to go and see this woman."

"Why is that, then?"

"Cos I'm going to make you." Kay looped an arm through Elaine's. "Come on."



The address they'd been given turned out to be in a suburban sidestreets. Elaine stared up at the door. "God, what do I say to her?"

"Just tell her that you're a terrestrial person who's had an extra-terrestrial experience."

Elaine stepped up and knocked. After a moment, the door was opened a crack. "Yes?" a fragile voice asked.

"Mrs Layton, I'm Rex Davies' daughter, Elaine. He tells me that you've had... similar experiences to me."

"Oh, you poor girl." The door was opened wide, and a large, serious-looking woman in her 60s invited them in. "Would you care for anything to eat?"

"No thanks," murmured Kay. "We just had a take-away."

Margaret Layton was a poet by trade, and her husband was a retired bookmaker, currently away at the races. Her lounge had framed copies of several poems on the wall, but, most startlingly, the familiar portrait of an

alien above the mantelpiece. She brought them tea, and sat down, staring at Elaine intently.

"So, what happened to you?"

Elaine explained, trying to avoid a strange urge to add details. When a story's only half-there, she supposed, people like to construct new material to fill in the gaps. After she'd finished, and to Kay's relief she didn't mention drugs, Mrs Layton nodded solemnly. "That's horribly familiar. It all began for me when I read a book by the American author Whitley Strieber. He described how he'd been being abducted for most of his life, and how he'd lost his memory of all those experiences."

"Hey," Kay clicked her fingers. "When I worked at the sf bookshop they were going to have a signing with him. With aliens visiting every night, none of the staff wanted him staying in their spare room."

Mrs Layton nodded gravely. "The night after I finished his book, I went to bed very troubled, and, sure enough, in the middle of the night they came for me. There were a crowd of them. They walked into my room, and surrounded my bed. I couldn't speak, I was paralysed. They floated me downstairs and out into the street, where there was this huge vessel hovering overhead. I couldn't believe that nobody saw it or heard it."

"Didn't your husband wake up?"

"No, that was the odd thing."

"What did they do to you in the ship?"

"Well, they seemed to conduct an internal examination. Probes were placed in my stomach, without any pain, though I still bear the scars, and they extracted this from my ear." She picked a tiny piece of metal off the sideboard and placed it in Elaine's palm. It was covered in thin lines and indentations. "I believe it to be a homing device, so they can find me wherever I go, because I've been abducted on holiday, in other towns, even abroad."

"And you've, erm, kept it?" Kay asked.

"Well of course. Somebody may want to examine it. The authorities don't, of course, because they've closed their eyes to this whole phenomenon. If they took notice of one case, they'd have to deal with them all. There'd be a mass panic and hundreds of abductees in Downing Street demanding compensation."

"Why do you think they're doing this to you?"

"Who knows? Many ideas have been put forward. In the old days, you see, people who were taken aboard flying saucers often turned out to be cranks. They came back with information that turned out to be nonsense, scientifically. If we believed them all, then we were being visited by a hundred species of benevolent helpers, all from different places, all with different plans and motives. The truth is, of course, more down to Earth. We are being visited by one species. They don't want to help us, or indeed invade us, but care no more for us than we do for laboratory animals." She leaned further forward. "Since all this started, I've become a vegetarian."

Elaine clasped her hand in hers. "Is there anything you can recommend, anything that will stop them coming?"

"My dear, I'm sorry. There's nothing. They will always come. Perhaps one day our technology will have advanced enough to spot them and prevent them, but I doubt it."

Elaine sagged. "Well, I've taken enough of your time."

"There are help groups, a single investigator looking after three or four women... I belong to one. Geoff, my

investigator, has recently become interested in the alien imagery in my poetry. He thinks it may help us to fix their point of departure."

"No, not my style."

Mrs. Layton showed the two of them out. "Haven't you tried security locks, TV cameras, guards and stuff?" asked Kay.

"What good would they be?"

"What does your husband think of all this?"

"He's not particularly interested. I suspect he's not really a believer. Well, I hope you can come to terms with things, Elaine."

"Thank you," Elaine smiled. "So do I."



They walked quickly a hundred yards down the road. Then they collapsed into laughter.

"I shouldn't laugh," Elaine shook her head. "Dad was right, it does sound the same. If this guy Strieber was the first to talk about it, then I'm virtually living out his book. And I'd hoped that I was unique."

"You know, I think you're all living out something else. You know what those aliens look like? The thingies out of *Close Encounters*. Only those were kind and sweet."

"So maybe Spielberg got it wrong?"

"Or maybe nobody accepts sweetness these days. Even Spielberg's dealing in dinosaurs and Nazis."

"This looks horribly like a suicide pact," Kay muttered. They were sitting naked on the floor of Elaine's studio, staring up at a giant alien head that she'd carved. "And my bum's covered in dust. How much d'you reckon you'd get for one of those? From one of the professional victims, I mean?"

"Well, artists are turning on to this stuff. There's a picture like the one Dad showed me in one of the London galleries, with cool writing scrawled over it, called *Anatomy of a Sky Creature*. The writing's a mixture of going along with it and taking the piss: there's a bit near the eye labelled 'missing memories' but an arrow points down to the 'cosmic anus'."

"Bit fixated in that direction, aren't they?"

"Maybe they all look the same because they're clones. Anyway, to work." Elaine produced the two grey tablets of DMT.

"Are you sure about this?"

"I've never been more sure about anything in my whole life."

"So not very, then?"

"Right. Here goes." She raised the pill to her lips.

The intercom buzzer on the front door sounded.

"I'll get it." Kay grabbed her towelling robe from the floor and wandered back into the flat. "Who is it?" she called into the machine.

"Dave. Thought you might like to have the montage Graphics made of your prints from the demo."

"Sure." Kay pressed the button to open the door. "This won't take a minute," she told Elaine. "Then we'll take the drugs."

Elaine sighed and put on her own robe. "You don't want to do this, do you?"

"There is no mental state that can't be achieved through the precise use of Newcastle Brown Ale. And I'm



not keen on meeting the Greys." There was a knock on the door. "But, I will do it." She let Dave in. He was a bright young photo editor with a mop of black hair and the permanent grin of somebody who works out.

"Hi Kay. Here's the —" he paused in handing over the envelope when he saw Elaine. "Oh, hi. How are Young's Slits today?"

"Sorry?" Elaine squinted at him.

"You talked about some experiment malarky at the club. On the sofa, right? Pukka. Did you catch the dwarfs' second act?"

"Did you see me leave?" asked Elaine.

Dave thought for a second. "Nah," he concluded. "Sorry. Nice to see you again, anyway. Bye."

After he left, Kay turned to Elaine. "And I thought that was going to be significant. You know, like the man from Porlock."

Elaine sighed. "Shall we?" She dropped her robe again, and Kay did the same, taking the tablet handed to her and throwing it down her throat. After a moment's hesitation, Elaine joined her. "Thank you for doing this with me. I wonder how long it takes to —"

The control panel of the universe, as someone from EMF once put it.

Elaine stared at her hand, rock solid in front of her. It wasn't even shaking, but she could no longer move it. She couldn't move anything, so she couldn't turn her head to see Kay.

But, apart from move, she could do anything. So she saw Kay in that way, using that ability. She was breathing very gently. It was like a waxwork of Kay, really, an empty body that wasn't her.

They were in a tunnel, the walls gently glowing white, and they were falling through it, weightless, bouncing when they hit a wall. Elaine thought that the tunnel was just an effect, that it would go on forever, but as soon as she thought that, they went round a corner and were in a place.

Ultimate cathedral. An upward tube, leading to a distant halo of darkness, and around the walls were gothic carvings, or perhaps people, frozen like they were, kept here forever. Maybe this was their hell.

And also on the walls were figures, hieroglyphs. Word pictures.

And then those figures were amongst them.

And the figures were the Greys.

"We are the keepers of dead ideas," said one, his voice a buzz. "What do you want of us?"

"Don't haunt me!" Elaine told them. "You smell of sulphur, you're little devils."

"We are wordsworths. We smell of sulphur for no reason of books, but because they smelt of sulphur in the street. From the magic box."

"Why do you keep bothering people?"

"They keep bothering us."

Elaine woke up, her body shaking. She took deep breaths, and opened her eyes, to see Kay leaning over her in concern. "You all right?"

Elaine sat up, and threw up over Kay's toes.

She jumped back. "Oh, for God's sake."

"Did you see them?" Elaine blurted out. "Did you?"

"No. I had a long walk down a tunnel, with a lot of

pounding in my head and a guy walking behind me in a Stars and Stripes hat. I couldn't turn round to look at him. After hours of that, I woke up. I tell you, I'm never going to do that again."

Elaine glanced at the clock. "My God, we were gone three hours."

"Yeah, but I've been awake for the last one. Take it from me, they didn't come for you."

Elaine put a hand to her head. "Hey... I've got a bruise."

"Where did you get that?" Kay inspected her temples. "Must have hit your head when the DMT came on."

"No, it's an old bruise..." Elaine murmured slowly. "Have you got the number of the guy who manages Little England?"

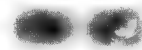


"Loved the two performance artists!" Kay gushed over the phone. "I know somebody who wants to see them. Yeah, somebody special. Could you tell me where they're appearing next? Cheers, I've got a pen..."

Elaine was staring at an old photo of her Dad. He was glancing down at the medals he wore with a kind of reluctant pride.

Kay put the phone down and walked back to her. "You're sure about this?"

"I am."



They watched from a corner table as the pub's compere for the evening made his introductions.

"Warm applause please for Joe Kaiser and his brother Mark. Ladies and gentlemen, the Kaiser Brothers."

A barman ran onstage with a box, and left it there. There was a loud explosion, and the two short artistes hopped out of the box in their mouse costumes. "Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport" blared out. They began dancing to it, and the audience, who had initially laughed nervously and slightly, began to laugh in unanimity, projecting warmth and human sympathy to the two short men dressed as mice. They were, in effect, laughing with them.

"It's a limited act, but they do it well," murmured Kay, getting out her camera.

"Sulphur." Elaine was deadly serious. "From the box."

"You're not saying —"

"This is cabaret, they'll do it all in one act."

The two small men dived back into the box, and emerged a moment later as cats with huge eyes. The music changed to the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine", and they started to bash their heads together to the tune, the crowd clapping along.

"Backstage," Elaine whispered, getting up.

Backstage turned out to be the corridor beside the toilets.

The two women waited until the men had finished their act and ran offstage. "Hi," Elaine said to them, "remember me?"

"Oh Christ," one of the cats muttered. "It wasn't me, love, it was him. He got a bit frisky, but I calmed him down."

"Don't know what he's talking about," said the other cat. "Oh, the other night was it? Listen, I'd had a few, and

you and me had a dance, and you said come on outside. I took that as an invitation. We had a bit of a fumble, nothing serious mind, and you passed out. Got you on your feet, put you in the back of the van, and you told us where home was. Asked if I could help you in, but you was really suspicious by then. Go home, you said. So we did. Listen, let me make it up to you. How about dinner on Sunday?"

The other cat was looking at him, his head turned at a slight, uncertain, angle, much the same angle at which Kay was looking at Elaine.

"No," Elaine said. "For one thing, I'm gay."

"Well you weren't that night, love."

"And for another thing, you're lying. You bash your heads together in the act, don't you? Are those cat masks made of metal?"

The cats looked at each other. "Yeah..." the other one began. "Yeah, come on Joe, she has to know. He followed you out, you see. You might have asked him to, I dunno. He tripped and bonked you over the head with the helmet. You were out cold, we read your filofax and dumped you outside your house. You're free to press charges should you wish."

"Yeah, you're right bro," agreed the first cat. "Got to make a clean breast of it."

"No," Elaine said. "For one thing, how's he going to trip over and bash anything above my knee? Was I kneeling down?"

"Funny you should say that, love -"

"And for another, while I was out cold, I was interfered with. You... Joe, is it? You cracked me right across the temporal lobes with a swipe of that helmet. And while I was out, you tried to rape me. Maybe your brother did stop you, I don't care. I'm going to have you arrested."

"Oh come on..." Joe laughed. "Who's going to believe a story like that? Bit of a grey area, isn't it? The jury isn't going to know what it's looking at."

Elaine stared at him for a moment, and then sighed, dropping her head. "You're absolutely right, aren't you? Juries believe all sorts of fairy stories, but this one wouldn't convince them. Oh well. Kay -"

The toe of Kay's Doc Marten smacked up between Joe's legs. He doubled over, retching. His brother backed away and opened his hands in a gesture of pacification. "I really did try."

"I don't care," Elaine told him. "It's your brother who I wanted twatted."

"I've got a whole twat list," Kay told Elaine as they lay in bed.

"I thought that was before I met you?"

"There's that therapist for a start. Ringwald. What was he after?"

"Money, or maybe he enjoyed the power he had over my memory porn. Maybe he was a Christian, like a few of the investigators Mrs Layton was on about. They need to believe that there are organized bunches of satanic child molesters out there, because they need an enemy and a cause. It's all wrapped up with abortion, too. The Greys are supposed to take sperm to make Grey/human hybrids."

"Michael Howard?"

"No human half."

"I just hope you never write your autobiography. Being attacked by the vertically-challenged... It's so reactionary. We'll be back to freak shows."

"I can't help the way reality goes. But I can tell Dad that I was mistaken, and he can sleep easy at night too."

Kay smoothed Elaine's quiff with her finger, taking care to avoid the bruise. "You know, Mrs Layton and her lot can't all be being done in by small cabaret artistes in cat costumes."

"And they'd have gotten away with it too, if it wasn't for us meddling kids."

"No, listen. Who are the Greys? Do you think they're real?"

"No, Kay, I don't. I think it's time we both got back to the real world, eh? Good night. Love you."

"Love you and all."

And they slept.

Elaine woke in the middle of the night, to the sound of the door opening.

She sat up in bed, and switched the light on.

Kay's cat poster stared at her from the far wall.

And beneath it stood a row of four Greys. Their skin was mottled and stretched, their heads were bulbous, and their eyes were blank and black. They had tiny mouths and noses, and no genitalia. Their arms were thin and they had four spindly fingers on each hand.

"Come with us," one buzzed.

"No," Elaine shook her head.

"We are from the place you call -"

"Don't give me all that science-fiction bollocks. If you're going to say Mars, you're wrong, and if you're going to say Alpha Centauri or something, well, that's a place too, and any people that live there won't have your morbid connection to the human race." She glanced down at Kay, but she hadn't woken up. She felt no urge to shake her. "Let me tell you what you are." She flung back the covers and walked to the end of the bed, pointing down at the little grey figures. "You're aborted fetuses, and the dead of Belsen, and cats who've been kidnapped and shaved in laboratories. You're fly-bitten refugees. You're everything that we feel guilty about. You do to us what we do to them, so we wake up feeling okay. We don't have to do anything to help in the real world. We have you to punish us instead. You're a pile of decadent, self-deluded shit."

And then Elaine woke up.

It had all been a dream.

She was standing at the end of the bed, wagging her finger at Kay's cat poster.

"Christ," she said. "That comes down in the morning. I'll get her a real bloody cat."

Kay woke up as she climbed back into bed. "You okay?"

"Yeah."

"Didn't get carried away by the Greys?"

"Nearly," Elaine told her, kissing the top of her head, "but I think I've got it out of my system."

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**Paul Cornell**, born 1967, is the author of many sf novels published in recent years, and he makes his *Interzone* debut with the above story. He has also written for television. See the interview with him which appeared in our last issue.

# CREATORS OF SCIENCE FICTION, 10: HUGO GERNSBACK

Brian Stableford

According to the account of his life given by Sam Moskowitz in *Explorers of the Infinite* (1963) the man after whom the Hugo Awards are informally named was born on 16th August 1884 in Luxembourg. He completed his education after the turn of the century at a technical college in the Rhineland town of Bingen, not far from Wiesbaden. He claimed that the book which first fired his imagination was a German translation of Percival Lowell's work on Mars, although he later became an enthusiastic reader of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. He emigrated to the USA in 1904, allegedly because he was refused patents in France and Germany for a new kind of battery. I say "allegedly" because everything that Sam Moskowitz wrote about his boyhood hero and sometime employer came directly from the great man's lips in the 1950s, by which time Gernsback was 75. To the extent that what he told Moskowitz has been checked by other researchers, it appears that Gernsback's account was by no means reliable.

Gernsback went to work for William Roche, a manufacturer of dry-cell batteries, but was dismissed after being found in Roche's office with confidential materials in his hands (he explained to Moskowitz that Roche had jumped to entirely the wrong conclusion). He found a partner and went into business manufacturing dry-cell batteries himself but soon withdrew from the partnership (because his partner was leaching away the profits, he told Moskowitz). He continued as sole proprietor of a similar business but it went bankrupt in 1907.

In 1904 Gernsback and a fellow-lodger had set up The Electro Importing Company (TELIMCO) to import scientific equipment from Germany and sell it on through mail-order catalogues. The star item was what Moskowitz described as "the first home radio set in history", although it was actually a wireless telegraph apparatus for sending and receiving Morse code. TELIMCO was investigated by police who thought that its ads were guilty of fraudulent representation, but no charges were brought (another mistake, Gernsback explained to Moskowitz). Gernsback was, however, trading in goods which were about to



enjoy a spectacular boom, and his experience of publishing promotional catalogues provided him with a further opportunity to branch out.

*Modern Electrics*, founded in 1908, was essentially an advertising tool, whose editorial content was primarily geared to the promotion of Gernsback's other stocks-in-trade. A significant number of its readers were radio enthusiasts and would-be inventors, and Gernsback wasted no opportunity to flatter this constituency with promises that they were the coming men, who not only had their fingers on the pulse of progress but stood to make fortunes. In order to ram this message home Gernsback wrote a fictionalized tract which offered a vivid picture of the inventor of the future: *Ralph 124C 41+* (serialized in 1911-1912).

Ralph, whose punning surname hardly justifies Moskowitz's opinion that Gernsback was possessed of a "rapier-like wit", is one of only ten mental giants permitted to use the plus suffix in the year 2660. As he moves through his world Gernsback offers lavish descriptions of the technological gadgets around him. In the book version published in 1925 and reprinted in 1950 these include the telephot (a video telephone), television, electric cars, wireless power-transmission, the electrical stimulation of crop-growth, radar, microfilm, anti-gravity, the hypnobioscope (for sleep-learning), the menograph (a thought-reading device), weather control and space travel, but some of these possibly were added in when the serial was being revised for book publication.

The plot of the story involves Ralph

falling in love by telephot and then performing a series of Herculean labours in order to save his beloved from various natural disasters (including death) and the dastardly attempts of two rival suitors – one of them a Martian – to kidnap and ravish her. The story bears far more resemblance to the fiction of contemporary pulp magazines and "dime novels" than to anything Verne or Wells might have written, although it does anticipate the similarly-inspired cinema serials which Hollywood had not yet started cranking out. The plot was, however, merely a convenient device. As Gernsback said in his introduction to the serial version, the story was "intended to give the reader as accurate a prophecy of the future as is consistent with the present marvellous growth of science."

Gernsback's original introduction went on to assure his readers that no matter how improbable the devices featured in the story might seem, "they are not impossible, or outside of the reach of science." Many later commentators have been impressed by the truth of this judgment, but it is arguable that the most significant thing about the "hits" scored by Gernsback's story is that all of them were, indeed, applications of the scientific knowledge of his own day. One thing that is absent from the image of 2660 inhabited by Ralph 124C 41+ is any conspicuous advancement in pure science.

For a mental superman, Ralph is decidedly uninterested in theory; he is an improviser of gadgets; the "laboratory" in which we find him as the story opens is an assembly-shop. The hero on which he is modelled – who must surely have been Gernsback's own hero – is clearly Thomas Edison, the very model of the practical experimenter and accumulator of patents. Edison – who did not die until 1931, although his greatest triumphs were already behind him in 1911 – was the presiding genius of the contemporary American zeitgeist, the shining example held up before all the clients of Gernsback's mail-order business.

Gernsback continued to feature fiction in *Modern Electrics*. Jacques Morgan wrote five stories, presumably to commission, which appeared every month from October 1912 to February 1913. When *Modern Electrics*



became *The Electrical Experimenter* later that year Gernsback began to broaden the range of contributors, eventually taking up his own pen again to contribute 13 accounts of “Baron Muenchhausen’s Scientific Adventures” between 1915 and 1917. These were narrated by one “I. M. Alier,” a radio ham of genius who also happens to be a flagrant opportunist and an argumentative churl; he also seemed to have served time in jail. We can, of course, only speculate as to where Gernsback might have found the inspiration for such a character, but it might be worth noting that he is the only character in Gernsback’s entire canon possessed of some literary semblance of life.

The second Muenchhausen adventure took care to establish that the exiled Baron was on the side of the Allies in the Great War, although he had removed himself to Mars by the time America got involved. Most of the other fiction published in *The Electrical Experimenter* was not considered sufficiently fantastic to warrant inclusion in Everett F. Bleiler’s magnificently comprehensive study of *Science-Fiction: The Early Years* (1990) but it did include an early two-part space opera by R. and C. Winthrop, “At War with the Invisible” (1918). This was illustrated by Frank R. Paul, who was by then – and was long to remain – Gernsback’s most prolific illustrator.

In 1920 another title-change converted *The Electrical Experimenter* into *Science and Invention*, presumably because part of its area of concern had been shifted into a companion magazine founded in 1919, *Radio News*. In the next ten years *Radio News* published more than a hundred short stories and novelettes, although most of them – according to Bleiler – were not speculative. In the same period *Science and Invention* clocked up a similar wordage of fiction, almost all of it far more extravagant than the material featured in its sister publication. The August 1923 issue was given over to what Gernsback called “scientific fiction,” and one of the contributors to that issue, Ray Cummings, was to become a regular contributor of serials. The most prolific contributor of all, however, was Clement Fézandie, whose series of “Dr Hackensaw’s Secrets” ran to more than 40 items.

Like many other contemporary heroes, Hackensaw was clearly modelled on Edison, but Fézandie seems to have been much better-informed about matters of science than his rivals and was certainly more adventurous than other writers of such series. Many of Hackensaw’s exploits involved biological inventions – the first item in the series dealt with possible aspects of cloning and genetic engineering, while the third extrapolated “the secret of suspended animation”. The second had probed “the secret of the atom” with

rather more intelligence than Ray Cummings was wont to display in his microcosmic romances.

Most historians of science fiction imply that these dabblings in fiction were a gestation period whose inevitable climax was *Amazing Stories* – an impression greatly encouraged in the 1950s when Sam Moskowitz offered Gernsback heroic status as “the Father of Science Fiction.” There is, however, no conspicuous evidence that Gernsback had any interest in science fiction per se until that fateful meeting with Moskowitz, whose extravagant flattery seems to have been very gratefully received. Gernsback did indeed launch *Amazing Stories*, after 15 years of dabbling in fiction, but it cannot be regarded as a natural progression from the work in his other magazines; very few of the authors featured in *The Electrical Experimenter* and *Science and Invention* produced original work for *Amazing Stories* and the first intention was to use the magazine as a vehicle for



reprinting the popular works of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells, using other reprints (including some from Gernsback’s other magazines) as fillers.

In 1926 the American pulp-magazine boom was at its giddy height, and many pulp publishers were employing the tactics of brand warfare, multiplying titles in order to occupy more of the limited space available on the newsstand racks. *Weird Tales*, founded in 1923, was using a considerable amount of science fiction, although other magazines which had flirted with the genre, like *Thrill Book*, had already gone broke. It seems likely that *Amazing Stories* was a purely commercial venture, which Gernsback undertook because he thought his existing subscription lists might help establish a secure commercial base for such a magazine. He seems

to have believed that he could reprint the entire works of Verne and Wells very cheaply (or even, in Wells’s case, without paying any fee at all) and when he went in pursuit of original work he did not call on his own stable of fiction-writers; he attempted instead to cash in on the enormous popularity of the exotic romances of Edgar Rice Burroughs and A. Merritt, who were among the most successful of all pulp writers. He had already persuaded Merritt to rewrite “The Metal Monster” as “The Metal Emperor” for use in *Science and Invention* and he got Burroughs to write *The Master-Mind of Mars* for the 1927 *Amazing Stories Annual* which preceded *Amazing Stories Quarterly*. The only writer featured in *Science and Invention* who did new work for *Amazing* was Fézandie, who did two more Dr Hackensaw stories for it before abandoning sf forever.

Gernsback had little to do with the actual running of *Amazing*; he hired T. O’Conor Sloane to act as associate editor and book-collector C. A. Brandt to identify and supply copies of suitable stories. His main interest was in radio; he had been a prime mover in founding the first organization of radio hams and he had written one of the first books on radio broadcasting. By 1926 his empire had expanded to include two radio broadcasting stations, W2XAL and WRNY, and these were the primary focus of his interest. WRNY conducted an early experiment in television broadcasting in 1928 to publicize the launch of yet another new magazine, called *Television*. In February 1929, however, a petition was made to render two companies owned by Gernsback and his brother Sidney – including the Experimenter Publishing Company – involuntarily bankrupt.

The account of the 1929 bankruptcy which Gernsback gave to Sam Moskowitz in the 1950s “explained” that it was the result of a wicked plot by a jealous rival and claimed that the creditors all received payment in full. Some other commentators ambitious to patch together a genre history assumed that it must have been the result of the famous Wall Street crash, although it happened several months beforehand. A summary of the *New York Times* account of the incident by Tom Perry, published in *Amazing* in July 1977, told a very different story, according to which the businesses were insolvent and Gernsback had to fight hard against charges that he had diverted assets from the threatened companies. These assets included the subscription lists which were almost certainly – criminally, if so – used by Gernsback to attract subscribers to the new magazines which he launched after the petition for bankruptcy was filed.

Moskowitz – never a man to take contradiction kindly – responded furiously to Perry’s article, but his

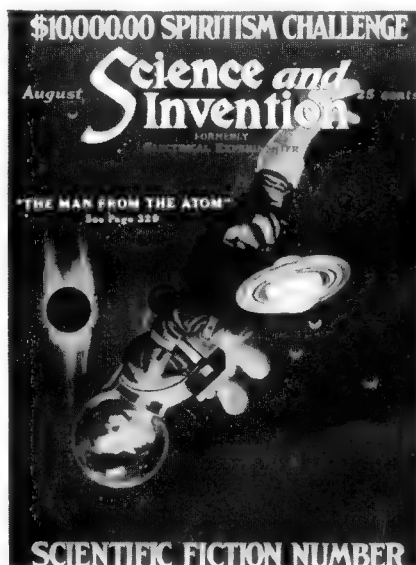
defence of Gernsback's honour in the October 1977 issue of *Amazing* was dramatically upstaged in the May 1978 issue, which reported the results of Perry's further researches. Perry revealed that it was the huge losses of the jewel in the Gernsback brothers' crown – the broadcasting station WRNY – which had run their entire enterprise on to the rocks, causing them to divert money from *Experimenter* which left the magazines' printing bills unpaid. It was the printers who had entered the petition for bankruptcy, and the Gernsbacks had responded by immediately abandoning *Experimenter* to its fate and setting up a new publishing company unburdened by any debt. Perry suggested that their probable intention was to continue *Amazing Stories* – which was by then the most profitable title in the stable – under the new imprint, and that they must have been very surprised when a buyer was found for the derelict company who was willing to discharge most of its debts and keep the magazines going.

Perry also observed that Hugo and Sidney had filed their own demands against the company, claiming several thousand dollars apiece for unpaid salaries in the weeks before the bankruptcy. He noted that the other creditors objected strenuously to the Gernsbacks paying themselves a thousand dollars a week for running an insolvent company, although he does not speculate as to what Hugo's subsequent contributors – who were, according to one of them, recompensed by word-rates of "microscopic fractions of a cent, payable on lawsuit" – might have thought of it. At the end of his article, however, Perry indulged in a little speculation himself, pointing out that if things had not worked out as they did the pulp science-fiction genre might have died almost as soon as it was born, whereas the continued competition between *Amazing* and *Wonder* actually served to inspire other imitators, most notable among them *Astounding Stories of Super-Science*.

By the beginning of 1929 *Amazing* had virtually given up using reprints. It had already begun picking up stories submitted by fans – Jack Williamson made his debut in the December 1928 issue – but Hugo Gernsback's involvement in the acquisition of material had probably been limited to issuing a contract for a batch of unwritten stories from David H. Keller, who he met socially. When his "new" *Amazing Stories* had to be retitled *Science Wonder Stories* – later combined with its short-lived companion *Air Wonder Stories* as *Wonder Stories* – he again hired a managing editor (David Lasser, replaced in 1933 by Charles Hornig) to do the actual work, although he still handed out contracts for unseen work to writers like Frank K. Kelly.

One can only speculate as to why writers like Charles Wolfe and Clement Fézandie, who had been prolific contributors to Gernsback's early magazines, abandoned the field – although Fézandie lived another 30 years – and why Ray ummings never wrote for either of Gernsback's sf magazines, although he was perfectly happy to write for *Astounding*. Whatever the reason, Sloane's *Amazing* and Lasser's *Wonder Stories* spent the early 1930s cultivating a new generation of writers, and taking aboard writers like Edward E. Smith, John Taine and Stanton Coblenz, who had previously found no market for their extravagant imaginative fiction.

Having been born out of the pulp magazine publishers' experiment in brand warfare, *Amazing* and *Wonder*



suffered its inevitable consequences. In order to defend their rack space all the publishers had to pump out more and more titles, with the inevitable result that all of them began to lose money hand over fist – but nobody dared let up first, lest he be squeezed out. By the mid-30s, magazine publishing suffered an economic holocaust. Corporate raiders moved in to pick up the pieces of *Amazing* and *Wonder*, both of which were delivered into the hands of editors who knew that the core of the science-fiction market consisted of teenage boys avid for action-adventure. They became, in essence, pulp equivalents of the comic books which were just beginning their triumphal march to economic glory.

Science fiction historians, for whom the evolution of *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* into John W. Campbell Jr's *Astounding Science Fiction* was the central plot of the story, have tended to represent the economic decay of *Amazing* and *Wonder* as a gradual loss of noble ambition, but it is not at all clear that the noble ambition was ever there. It is certainly true that the editorial with which Gernsback launched the first issue of *Amazing* was full of braggadocio, loudly adver-

tising the potential of the new genre of "scientification", but it really was an advertisement, bearing little or no relation to the path actually followed by Gernsback's magazines. He promised that they would be instructive and prophetic, but the actual editorial policies made only token efforts to maintain any such pretence. Unlike *Astounding*, whose first incarnation offered formulaic pulp melodrama in a futuristic setting, *Amazing* and *Wonder* never had any real direction at all; they were neither fish nor fowl, although their creator was eventually to feed Sam Moskowitz a liberal helping of good red herring.

Even before the 1929 bankruptcy Gernsback had started another publishing sideline in association with the one writer he had personally recruited to *Amazing*, David H. Keller. Keller was a Freudian psychiatrist who had a deep and abiding interest in the psychology and sociology of sex. Alongside his fiction Gernsback issued a ten-volume series of sex education pamphlets, each of which sold for a good deal more than an issue of *Amazing*. When *Wonder Stories* failed to make the best of the flying start it received by virtue of its pirated subscription list Gernsback was quick to found a digest magazine called *Sexology* in 1933, which continued to thrive long after the fire-sale of Gernsback's fiction magazines. For the next 20 years Gernsback showed not the slightest interest in science fiction – until he met the worshipful Sam Moskowitz, and was told that he was the father of a precious orphan.

Moskowitz persuaded the aging Gernsback, who was still publishing *Radio-Electronics Magazine* alongside *Sexology*, to get back into science fiction. Moskowitz presumably pointed out that the genre was performing so well in a troubled marketplace that new titles were appearing all the time. Gernsback launched the glossy *Science-Fiction Plus* in 1953 with Moskowitz as "managing editor." To its first issue Gernsback contributed a boastful editorial in which he complained that he ought to have been allowed to take out patents on all the devices "invented" in *Ralph 124C 41+* and a "novelette" which was actually a pseudo-journalistic exercise in futurology about the exploration of Mars.

Gernsback's subsequent editorials similarly combined extravagant self-congratulation with plaintive whining about the refusal of critics to take science fiction seriously as a species of prophecy. If he ever read any of the fiction that Moskowitz bought for the magazine – which was not without interest, but had no value whatsoever as serious technological scientific speculation – he might have understood why that was. What he did quickly realize, however, was that the ongoing boom in magazine science

fiction was the result of desperation on the part of publishers who were watching their entire marketplace disappear in the face of paperback competition, and he killed the loss-making magazine after seven issues. His last editorial complained bitterly about the tendency of modern science fiction to “gravitate more and more into the realm of the esoteric and sophisticated literature”, insisting that science fiction ought to be written “into simple language” (his italics) for the benefit of children.

Gernsback did make some further efforts to practise what he preached. In 1958-9 he wrote a quasi-journalistic novel about the invasion of Earth by alien Xenos. This proved unpublishable, although a version from which Sam Moskowitz claimed to have removed all the extraneous non-fiction material – thus reducing its length by half – was published in 1971, four years after Gernsback’s death, as *Ultimate World*. It is an exceedingly bad book by any standards. In parallel with this lost endeavour Gernsback published a series of brief “Christmas annuals” entitled *Forecast*, which reprinted a few of his last endeavours in fiction and futurology from *Radio-Electronics* and *Sexology*, while constantly harking back to the triumphs of Gernsback’s early career.

The final edition of *Forecast* (Christmas 1959) featured a lead article on spaceliners, a feature on “The Odorchestra” (an apparatus first proposed in one of Baron Muenchhausen’s scientific adventures, somewhat resembling a Wurlitzer organ, whose purpose would be to add a scent-track to movies) and “Jeanne,” which advertised itself as a “bizarre romance.” This was a story about a transvestite and would-be pioneer of transvestism, strongly reminiscent in its rhetoric of the Ed Wood movie *Glen or Glenda* (1953).

There is no doubt that Hugo Gernsback was a remarkable man. It would be difficult to imagine anyone more likely to respond to Sam Moskowitz’s honest and generous hero-

worship, and the response Gernsback made is entirely typical of him. Invited to pontificate on the subject of the genre whose father he had been appointed, he opined that it was mostly rubbish, ruined by literary affectation. Of the first anthology of Hugo winners he said that only one of the nine stories it contained was science fiction (he did not say which one but he probably meant Daniel Keyes’s “Flowers for Algernon”), the remainder being fantasy.

Sam Moskowitz was right to identify Gernsback as the father of pulp science fiction, on the grounds that he founded *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories*, and it is understandable that Moskowitz’s deep and abiding love of the genre prevented him from noticing that the procreative act in question was more akin to a casual visit to a prostitute than to any kind of responsible parenthood. Countless science fiction fans have heard Moskowitz, while speaking at conventions, recall his meetings with Gernsback with great affection and even greater reverence; it would have taken a brave and callously inconsiderate heckler to point out to him that the father of science fiction always regarded his offspring – and treated it – as a contemptible bastard whose worthlessness was ameliorated solely by the slight evidence its existence provided of his own prophetic genius.

If, as we are perfectly entitled to suspect, the fundamental truth of the matter lies in economic history then the creation of pulp science fiction was a chapter of accidents. When pulp brand warfare briefly created an economic climate into which science fiction might be launched Hugo Gernsback did not respond by hiving off the kind of “scientifiction” that he was featuring regularly in *Science and Invention*. What he did instead was in one sense more ambitious, but in another rather cowardly – he went for what looked like a much safer option, cashing in on work that had already proved its popularity. The sudden appearance of a legion of fanatical lovers of the genre, many of whom

were begging to supply him with stories for little or no payment, probably astonished him – but it certainly presented him with a chance of saving his neck when WRNY’s catastrophic failure looked like dragging him down. It seems highly probable that he intended to carry off as many of Experimenter’s assets as he could get away with – including *Amazing Stories* – and never expected to find himself in competition with it. When that competition proved too strong he was quick to bale out – but by that time, the baby was born; the genre label had been swept up into the maelstrom of brand warfare.

Had its care been left to Gernsback, genre science fiction would have died in the mid-1930s. The kinds of science fiction which were still being published then – which bore not the slightest resemblance to the scientific fiction of *Science and Invention* or the rather different scientifiction of the original *Amazing Stories* – could easily have been diverted, along with other kinds of exotic costume drama, entirely into the world of comic books. The fact that sf clung on to its foothold in the pulps had nothing to do with Hugo Gernsback and everything to do with people like Sam Moskowitz: the fans who had found far more within the fledgling genre than anyone had yet put into it, and were avid to make up the deficiency.

The adoptive fathers of science fiction were men like Donald A. Wollheim, who edited pulp science-fiction magazines without a salary or an editorial budget because that was his vocation, and John W. Campbell jr, who believed – unlike Hugo Gernsback – that the genre had authentic potential as a medium of scientific speculation, and as a means of investigating the sweeping social changes which scientific and technological progress would inevitably precipitate. It is they who deserve the credit for its nurture, and for its real achievements.

But then, what did the original Oscar ever do for the movies?

Brian Stableford

Ian R MacLeod

Stephen Baxter

Molly Brown

fiction

Ian McDonald

Keith Brooke

insight

David Langford

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/iplus>

infinity plus

Nicholas Royle

Eric Brown

critique

Jonathan Wylie

Oh dear. It has been pointed out to me that August 1997 was not the best time for me to publish a story (in DAW's anthology *The Fortune Teller*, ed Schimel & Greenberg) whose amazing examples of prediction include the routine *Times* headline PRINCESS DI IN PALACE SHOCK HORROR. I'd forgotten that....

## THE ASYLUM OF ADVENTURE

**Stephen Baxter** scaled new pinnacles of erotic fame with a photo-call for *Playboy* – owing to his collaborative story with Arthur C. Clarke, upcoming in the January *Playboy* in nice time for Clarke's birthday. "While it takes five days and 35 light sources to do a centrefold, it took 30 minutes of daylight and an old bit of polystyrene to do me. The photographer actually told me to put more clothes on."

**Greg Egan** embarrassedly annotates the author bio on the page facing the contents of his *Diaspora* (Millennium, UK): "The publisher's claim that I've been short-listed for the Clarke Award is a load of old bollocks."

**Harlan Ellison** appeared again on Tom Snyder's CBS chat-show (24th September). Hinting that publishing *Dangerous Visions* might have been harder today owing to censors and bluenoses, he nevertheless assured us all: "There will be a *Last Dangerous Visions*; watch the skies."

**Dan Gallagher**, a new sf writer not known to me, gained vast notoriety by attaching himself to various 1997 Worldcon panels for which he wasn't scheduled and then (a) reciting the entire plot of *His Novel*; (b) trying to convert at least one panel into a religious revival meeting. *Audience*: "Take the mike away from him!" Convention runners were seen to place Gallagher's name on a little list.

**George Hay** (1922-1997), died on 3rd October. His most visible sf legacy is the Science Fiction Foundation and *Foundation* magazine ... merely the tip of the iceberg. For decades George was the ideas man behind the British sf scenes, driven by his belief that sf concepts could transform society, and constantly devising weird and sometimes wonderful projects revealed to the world on his famous pterodactyl-adorned notepaper. Schemes in which I became involved included the "reconstructed" H. P. Lovecraft *Necronomicon*, a special sf issue of *Science and Public Policy*, the *Starlight* electronic sf news/reviews pages on Prestel, a magazine called *Reality* distributed solely by fax, and constant (often successful) agitation for reprints of sf/fantasy classics. As a genuine and charismatic British eccentric, a good man, and a gadfly who nagged so many of us into unlikely projects, George will be multiply missed.

**Judith Merril** (1923-1997) died on 12th September, aged 74. She wrote some notable sf but is most fondly remembered as an anthologist and feminist champion of sf: for the dozen 1950s-60s *Year's Best* collections which resolutely breached the walls of the sf ghetto, for promoting 1960s "New Wave" sf to a US audience with

*England Swings SF* (1968; alias *The Space-Time Journal*) for inaugurating the *Tesseract* anthology series which drew attention to Canadian sf, and additionally for her gleeful, entertaining gossip about past sf-writer lovers. The Merril Collection of SF, Speculation and Fantasy, based on her huge 1970 donation of material to the Toronto Public Library, is a world-class sf resource.

**Salman Rushdie**, speaking on the radio (10th September) about his *New Yorker* article on media excesses following the death of Princess Diana, cited a science-fictional parallel: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*, where celebrity starlet Montana Wildhack is trapped in an alien zoo so they can study every detail of her mating habits. Ouch.

**Walter Jon Williams** has been enjoying, or not enjoying, a run-in with *Wired* magazine over his 1986 novel title *Hardwired* ... a title subsequently licensed by WJW for games, action figures, cars, etc, and (nearly) as Paramount's "improved" title for *Johnny Mnemonic*. Imagine his joy when menacing *Wired* lawyers forced cancellation of NovaLogic's 1996 *Hardwired* CD-ROM game, costing WJW a heap of money, on the basis that (a) *Wired* owns everything with "Wire" in the title; (b) *Wired*'s brand-new imprint *HardWired* Books obviously has a prior claim over anything published in 1986. WJW's legal struggle was delayed through much of 1997 owing to *Wired* attorneys' claimed difficulty in getting a deposition from their on-line empire's jet-setting bossman Louis Rossetto ... who, we must infer, lacks both e-mail and a cellphone. WJW adds: "Word has reached me that *Wired* is dreadfully upset that I have chosen to go public in this way. I am assured that they never meant to restrict my use of *Hardwired*. What do they call a trademark action against one of my licensees? Chopped liver?" He gleefully reports that *Wired* has since dropped its parallel trademark actions in the British courts.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Sidewise Awards.** These new prizes for alternate-history sf were presented for the first time in 1997. Long Fiction: Stephen Baxter, *Voyage*. Short: Walter Jon Williams, "Foreign Devils" ... our editor chortled over this category's Honourable Mention of "Abdication Street" by *Interzone*'s Kim Newman & Eugene Byrne.

**Useful Words.** For decipherers of Gene Wolfe's *Book of the Long Sun* character names: *oosik* (Inuit), the penis bone of the walrus. For jaded reviewers of too much genre fantasy: *ælfsogða* (Anglo-Saxon), a hiccup or eructation thought to be caused by elves.

**First Contact with Planet Burke.** "I have exciting news for you and all Terrans!" begins this tacky alien circular offering *The Burke's Peerage World Book of Terrans*, as sent to a reader called (oh, I see) *Terran*....

**R.I.P.** General Sir John Hackett (1910-1997), author/editor of the futurological

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

*The Third World War* (1978). Burgess Meredith (1908-1997), best-known to fans as The Penguin in the Adam West *Batman* tv series and 1966 movie.

**British Fantasy Awards** ... the 1997 novel shortlist: Iain Banks, *Excession*; Clive Barker, *Sacrament*; Storm Constantine, *Scenting Hallowed Blood*; Robin Hobb, *Assassin's Apprentice*; Graham Joyce, *The Tooth Fairy*; Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*; Michael Marshall Smith, *Spares*; Peter Straub, *The Hellfire Club*.

**Publishers and Sinners.** HarperCollins US backed down after compounding its dodgy cancellation of 106 book contracts with attempts to intimidate authors into repaying advances or assigning HC a share of income from any resale of their work (as a condition of receiving the balance of the advance). These shark-like demands were eventually relaxed. All this results from a \$270 million "restructuring" which aims to make HC hugely more profitable by publishing fewer books.

**Worldcon 2000.** Psephologists failed to register astonishment at the shock victory of Chicago's bid to hold the 58th World SF Convention, which was unopposed. Hence Chicon 2000, 31 Aug-4 Sep 2000: details from PO Box 642057, Chicago, IL 60665, USA.

**Thog's Masterclass.** "They looked at each other with naked eyes." (Gordon R. Dickson, *Young Bleys*, 1991)... "Dr Kauffiff was perching over his glasses again, this time in an unspoken question." (Vanna Bonta, *Flight*, 1995)... "He [the fully clothed hero] could feel Dr. Kauffiff's scrutiny all over him..." (*ibid.*)... "The marshland had run for a day's walk." (Mick Farren, *The Texts of Festival*, 1973)... "The bazooka rang like a tuning fork." (Tom Monteleone, *Seeds of Change*, 1975)... "Their range was, within limits, virtually unlimited." (A. J. Merak, *No Dawn And No Horizon*, 1959)... "He was handsome and blond, with the same height and almost the same muscular build as Chastity, except her chest-circumference measurement involved different lumps from his." (Robert L. Forward, *Saturn Rukh*, 1997)





## REVIEWED

## Been Bondage

John Clute

The deaths of Judith Merrill and George Hay, this autumn, close together, are signals hard to ignore that our grasp upon the earth we walked once, in the dew of the morning, is fragile. As well as being a warning shot to the heart of genre, their deaths coat instantly with a marmoreal patina the two sf archives to which they gave their last decades; the signals are something personal, too, of course. Suddenly – their deaths depose – an absence of gravity will soon spew each one of us, separately and soon, down some similar absence incomparable to night. The infinitely narrow wave of the present tense will soon lose us, for what we were worth, forever. This may not be the message that the parents of our grandparents bore out of the imperium of the 19th century into the century we are now about to wear out; but it is most certainly the message we carry down the line into the next. Anything we are going to do we must do here, in this place, now. Shake the sugar down.

The rest is history, which Judith Merrill and George Hay have now become. It was always hard to guess what either of them did in fact think, in the end, they had accomplished over the last decades of their fairly long lives (she was born in 1923; he was born in 1922); and now it is impossible. Their creative writing years were long past. For both of them (I think) the sf world, the world of words they spent most of their energy for decades haranguing, had become pretty grotesque: fast food to fatten Eloï. I think Judith Merrill thought most of us were bullshitters who didn't know shit from bolshi; and I think the water table had fallen too deep for George to drink.

In 1970, a long ways back in the

history they have become, it didn't seem nearly as late. In the UK, George Hay inspired the founding of the Science Fiction Foundation, which housed in Barking a ragamuffin collection of books he clearly thought were less an archive than a key. Books were not to be preserved, they were to be *used*; flung at the ignorance of the world. In Canada, on the other hand, Judith Merrill finagled the creation of the Spaced Out Library (more recently the Merrill Collection), which was nothing but an archive, built around the spine of her donated collection. She did her shouting under other hats.

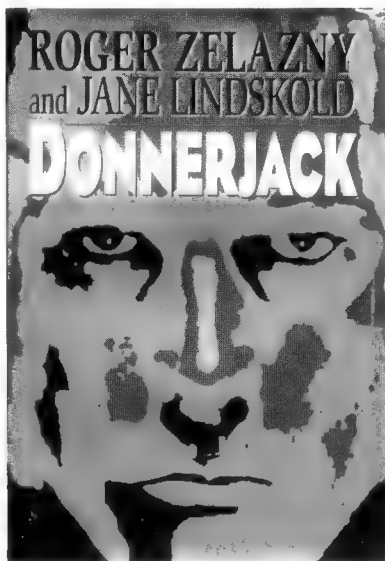
But now the founders have died together. The Merrill Collection is housed literally in marble halls, awaiting rediscovery a thousand years hence; the SFF ghosts its now-organized collection in an underground sanctum of the University of Liverpool, a sanctum George Hay never (I think) visited. The two orga-

nizations, though they retain nuances of difference, seem remarkably similar. As portals, they face away from us. Like Janus in Flatland, they look one direction only, vespertine and fixed: into the past, where indeed so much of the genre now reposes, a thousand turtles down. Individual sf writers may continue to use genre tools in order to tell the histories of now becoming something else; but the genre whose tools they wield is mostly history. Sf has become *manifest*. Sf is a bondage of the been. Sf is history. Judith Merrill and George Hay, in the end, and against their every instinct, have made history.

It is a past which can claw writers down. It is the past which claws *Donnerjack* (Avon, \$24) down. Like Judith Merrill and George Hay, Roger Zelazny has become history, and this novel – of which he had apparently completed about 150 pages in draft a year or so before his death in 1995, leaving the rest in the form of notes and instructions – seems to have been fatally marmorealized out of reverence for its dead maker. Zelazny's co-author and completer of the book was Jane Lindskold, his partner for the last several years of his life; she is a proficient writer on her own, and her work on *Donnerjack* – which *looks* as though it begins in earnest at the start of Part Two – never lacks intensity of address to the task. But it looks like it was the wrong task. It looks as though she's taken on the task of Janus in Flatland.

Like Tad Williams's *Otherland* (reviewed in *Interzone* 119) but far more succinctly, the first 150 pages of *Donnerjack* establish a virtual-reality, internet-generated, alternate world (here called Virtu), which is hauntingly analogous to our own "real" world (here called Verité), but which (like *Otherland*) constitutes a set of worlds with the stays loosed. It is a set of worlds in which it is possible – if you have gained iconic control over events – to do what you will. Characters, including Donnerjack himself, are introduced and, are Grand Toured rapidly through a number of *mises en scènes*.

As one of the original architects of Virtu, Donnerjack (like so many of Zelazny's protagonists) seems to have attained (or has now revealed to the world) a kind of immortality within the labyrinth of reality, the gnosis Cubed of the created worlds. Moreover, he has lived through the most significant event referred to in the backstory – an event variously called the Creation Scramble or the Genesis Scramble – when the Net crashes worldwide, but because its inherent momentum has become so great Virtu not only survives but becomes autonomous. Donnerjack becomes



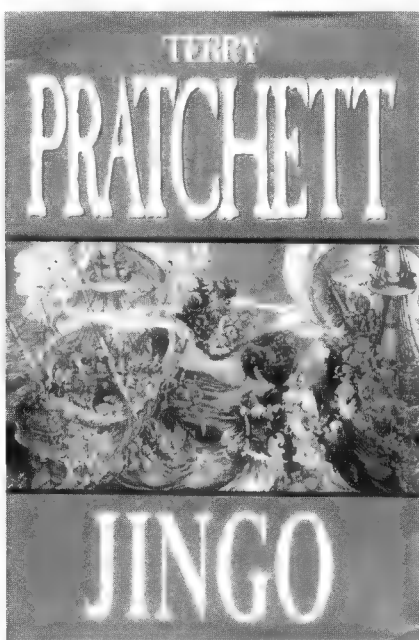
one of the gods of the new nests of imperium, while retaining a life in Verité.

But he is not the only god, or kind of god. Virtu has either shaped itself in a fashion significantly likely to generate gods out of the innumerable pantheons worshipped by humans in Verité for thousands of years, or constitutes a furtherance of the kind of reality in which gods did in fact flourish. It does not, perhaps, much matter which, Tinkerbelle or Isis, the gods of Virtu impress themselves upon the pages of happening.

For complex reasons, Donnerjack is forced to make an Orpheus bargain with Death, who is one of the gods. He consequently carries back to Verité his dead bride, who soon becomes pregnant. According to the bargain, this child belongs to Death, which sounds like a grim fate, though readers of Terry Pratchett's Discworld sequence are merely the most numerous single cohort of those for whom Death, in books, has no sting, speaks in CAPS (Zelazny's Death's Wry Gnostications could have been rendered easily in CAPS, and has assistants named Mort and, for all I know, Wary). In any case, though it takes Lindsfold a merry couple hundred pages to bring Donnerjack Jr. and Death together, nobody need worry about the young lad's fate; and, one suspects, nobody does.

But before any of this is finally allowed to happen, we have long since begun to lose anything but a sacerdotal memory of the 150 dazzling pages Zelazny himself seems to have written. There had been rumours for years that Zelazny – after raising his children, and after some personal travails had been lived through – was once again prepared to attempt to speak in the voice of many colours of long ago, when he began, when he sang epithalamium the tropes of genre, when he laid siege. The first 150 pages of *Donnerjack* are a sign that the rumours may have been true. These pages are swift, and impatient, deeply expert; there is not a phatic passage (see review of Tad Williams for an expatiation on phatic discourse in Mod Fant) to be found; there is vanishingly small interest in the roles of “character building,” so that characters race through their paces like metamorphs of *Mabinogion*; and new information constantly feeds into the broil.

After page 150, however, the broil is off. Lindsfold – or so it seems to the reviewer – takes over, and ministers the tale onwards. Out of reverence – or so it seems – to the memory and example of Roger Zelazny, she meticulously, though at great length, explains what he had begun down to the last detail, without daring a moment of rampage: no laying siege

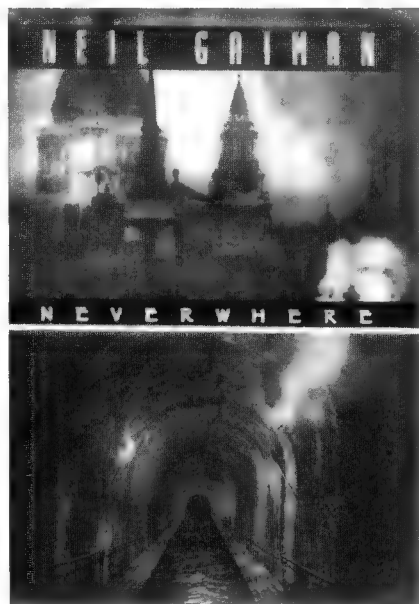


to story here, no shaking the tree of story till it sting epithalamium the teller and the told. None of this, perhaps, is surprising. She had a duty, and accomplished that duty as a minister might accomplish a service: without any sassing the incipit.

So *Donnerjack* is a church.

There is a very odd misquotation from William Butler Yeats on page 338.

Any review of Terry Pratchett's *Jingo* (Gollancz, £16.99) which began at the beginning would go several thousand words. *Jingo* is a Discworld tale, number 21 in the sequence, and it adds seamlessly to the banyan path of interwoven stories that make up, in 1997, perhaps the longest *successful* series ever written. There are others, of course. But Biggles did not improve; no single extractable strand of Michael Moorcock's oeuvre is this long; none of P. G. Wodehouse's series ran to this many volumes, though both Jeeves & Wooster and Blandings



were added to for half a century or more. But it is even more remarkable than that. *Jingo* not only does not dishonour its predecessors; it is in fact better than most of them. The story: an Atlantis-like island suddenly surfaces in the ocean that separates Ankh-Morpork from a desert kingdom. Both empires claim the new island. Commander Vimes and Captain Carrot are inserted by Vetinari – the Cardinal Richelieu-with-Attitude-like *de facto* ruler of Ankh-Morpork – into the ensuing mess, which is cleared up. The homilies are, as in the Vimes subset of novels within the larger whole, frequent. Reality constantly threatens to thicken like dusk upon the hijinks. The industrial revolution (as I believe Pratchett himself has said) increasingly threatens, within the context of the increasing density of Discworld reality, to explode transmogrifyingly; and *Jingo* includes several totemic moments in which it is made clear that Discworld is being prevented from becoming history. So Eden holds.

A note on plot: the reference to Wodehouse is not adventitious. Though he lacks Wodehouse's obsessively neat ingenuity of manufacture, Pratchett similarly stitches his complicated plots together into a kind of under-net for enablement, a security matrix constantly almost visible beneath the surface of the telling, giving the jokes and homilies space to be told, but also instructing them to be told in a certain direction. Also like Wodehouse, however, a Pratchett plot never seems quite to be *told*. Its affective point lies in being a net, not an outcome. The Pratchett plot sits deep within the mind's eye like a quilt, which you traverse in stitches of jokes, while the climaxes slip by like done knitting. But perhaps there is a point here. If dystopia is the *telling* of utopia, then perhaps history is the telling of Discworld.

As the BBC was unable to supply this reviewer with a finished copy of the first version of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, which they published last year in the UK, it has seemed best to wait until now, and to look briefly at the definitive US release: *Neverwhere* (Avon, \$24), a bit longer than the original, smoother, finished. The novel stays close to the BBC mini-series of which it is, technically, a novelization; but Gaiman having written both series and novel, this is less in fact a novelization than a final casting.

Gaiman is a creature of the late years of the century, very knowing about genre, with a sweet-tooth knack for the reconfiguration of retro, so that figures like The Sandman are like puns: at the same time both echo and adumbration. The coign or double vision of the *fin de*



*siècle* works here, too, though perhaps at points all too infallibly. If there is a negative consequence of Gaiman's years as an author of comic scripts, it is a tendency – which the comic as a form profoundly requires – towards *instruction*. The scriptwriter must, to begin with, obviously enough, instruct his illustrator; but it is more than that. The radical of apprehending as one actually reads comics – as Scott McCloud makes perfectly clear, perhaps inadvertently, in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) – is indeed a radical of instruction. It is not just an alphabet, out of which words come. It is instructions about the words themselves. Comic art tells its audience, not at all invisible, *how to perceive* *Story*.

So, occasionally, does Neil Gaiman in *Neverwhere*. Before we close with a brief synopsis of his fine neat tale of London understood as an edifice, an example: it is a paragraph from page 128, taken very nearly at random; except for a syntactical slither at the end, it is an unexceptionable passage of description, a fair remove from the highest pitch Gaiman is capable of, but not routine. Here:

Slugs sprawled indolently under the springs of the burnt mattresses; snails left slime trails across the broken glass; large black beetles scuttled industriously over smashed gray plastic telephones and mysteriously mutilated Barbie dolls.

Four words need contemplation here: “indolently,” “slime,” “industriously” and “mysteriously.” These words are extra. They are not needed to quicken the reader's native apprehension of, for instance, the indolence of slugs, or to remind him that snails do not leave breadcrumbs, or to point out the industriousness of beetle scuttle; and as we are never told the difference between a Barbie doll which has been mutilated and one which has been mysteriously mutilated, we may perhaps be forgiven if we assume that Neil Gaiman doesn't know either, and that the word “mysteriously” was generated out of a habit of mind (and that it is simply a small misfortune that the grammar of the sentence, as scumbled over by a word not wanted on the voyage, could be read as telling us large black beetles mysteriously mutilate Barbie dolls).

But it is the habit of mind that interests us. It is a habit of knowing, perhaps too well, exactly what one wishes to have had conveyed; it is a habit of instruction. In this case, the instruction seems addressed not to readers of a novel but to the illustrator of a script (whose task it is to pass the instruction on, graphically). It is not so much a flaw as a characteristic. It does not spoil *Neverwhere*, though it may help to explain some

moments of readerly languor, moments when the reader may find herself saying Let me alone for a moment, I want to read the *story*.

That story itself is exemplary. It is a Fantasy of London. As in most Urban Fantasies which depict the City as a kind of Edifice, London Above is Mirrored by London Below. The Labyrinth of London Below Crosshatches with the upper world through Portals. The residents of London Below are more or less Invisible to those who live in daylight, and who half-Perceive the Underworld denizens as figments of Wainscot, usually in the aspect of beggars. (I have taken the liberty of capitalizing a number of words here, not so much to advertise the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, of which I was co-editor, and which contains entries on all the capitalized terms except Above and Below, though there is one entitled As Above, so Below; but because Gaiman's utter clarity of designation of the nature and the workings of his tale make *Neverwhere* a nearly perfect lesson in how the narrative structure of fantasy can be made articulate.)

The young protagonist falls in with Door, a highborn young woman of London Below, becomes invisible himself, and follows her, in fear and trembling, down into the workings. Topological connections between Above and Below are restricted almost exclusively to Underground stations. Above, the Angel opens into a secular bit of Islington; below, it is the abode of a dire angel. Above, it's Blackfriars; Below it's... Above it's Earl's Court; Below it's... Above it's Cockfosters; Below it's... The story soon develops into a Quest with Companions for a key which will open a gate or portal or Door. It is enticingly told, with a swift hieratic glare to the telling, mostly; and with two villains whose evilness is both terrifyingly motiveless and hired: neat. There is some sense that more could have been told, but that sense subtends a sense that, in his creation of the edifice of London, Gaiman has entered upon a world too copious, too sub-aqueous and mazed, to be exhausted in a single tale. Dickens is more profound, and more deeply oneiric; Chesterton is more in love with the colour of the thing; Moorcock is more bonded, more submissive to the texture of London story. But Gaiman, in *Neverwhere*, has given us at least the bones of the best and purest London fantasy yet written.

**T**he Millennium, touted on the cover of the book, attaches itself to A. A. Attanasio's *Centuries* (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99) like a tin can to a dog's tail: but backwards. We begin as the Millennium happens, in the year 2000, but flicker there only for an instant, and pass on, by Sta-

pleonian leaps of approximately a century each, on to 3000, at which point the whole universe does, or does not, collapse like a house of shadows into the sub-quantal compact dimensions, which we have been learning about, where reality is dense: pure Narnian heaven for those able to follow the wave of collapse inwards. There is something gnostic about this: the sense that the Big Bang represents a wasting into almost infinite and lonely exiguity of Reality proper, a thinning propagation of Shadow, a grossly thinning gaping of “the Judas Kiss of space.”

The surface plot of *Centuries* follows the lives of two or three characters through these ten centuries. Ellen Vancet is a very bright but normal human being, her only enhancement being a form of immortality; she begins as a scientist in a unit created by a short-lived authoritarian world government, where she is involved in last-ditch (but ultimately successful) attempts to save the world from the consequences of 20th-century waste, destruction, overpopulation (and the other usual suspects). One of the genetically enhanced humans she creates is Rafe von Takawa, a “metasapient” – Attanasio creates sf language with weird solipsistic fervour: none of his terms is particularly awkward, or wrong; but terms like “metasapient” read like a Martian's attempt at paraphrasing “Slan.” Together, half unknowingly, they infect the entire world with metasapience, excepting only those (like Ellen) who refuse the process and who occupy, as normal human beings, a cherished secondary status on the Earth, where they are known as Aborigines, live in Reservations, and savour the world in a rather New Age manner.

There is a lot of plot, recounted remotely with ample recourse to Attanasio's estranged vocabulary. Through synopsis, and talking-head infodumps, and exemplary episodes, it describes the gradual turning of attention of the metasapient post-human race – from matters of survival in the vacuous echoes of the Judas Kiss – to a centuries-long debate on the ethical and practical nimbus of implications that embroil the decision whether or not to implode this universe in order to shoot the chute into the compact dimensions, “into the heart of the blue dragon curled smaller than a quark”; a decision which is taken halfway through the book. The decision is to go for implosion.

The Aborigines are kept in the dark. Ellen is told. The plot thickens and thins and leaps like some surreal candy. Towards the end, the debates become more and more intense; Attanasio's language attains, not infrequently, a poignant density of metaphor rarely aimed at in sf writ-

ing, though often aspired to by authors of fantasy novels of instauration: in which the world story is finally told in clear.

What Attanasio says in clear is that the metasapients – now known as the Maat – are not in fact wrong. “The Big Bang was a fall,” one of the Maat tells Rafe, who has continued to resist implosion as a sin against

the given (though exploded) universe:

Our violent history is the evil of our loss – the evil of our separation from the infinite values and perfect symmetry of the compact dimension. Chance, the instrument of God, has led to cosmic collapse. The exile is over. We’re going home.

And they do. They escape the intoler-

able bondage of the been, of a universe thinner than vacuum; a universe too thin to carry the sound of thought.

And Aborigines are no longer even the stuff dreams are made of.

It is an sf novel from the next century.

John Clute

At fantasy’s heart is a forest – or perhaps it is an English wood. And at the heart of the wood is a hole in the ground. And in the hole is, of course, a hobbit (or a badger, if the wood is wild). Bad things might happen outside the wood, but the wood never changes. As John Clute points out in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Orbit, £50), the armada of triple-deckers set sail in Tolkien’s wake all tell the same story. It is the story of a land made sick and the search for its restoration. It is the story of the fisher king who makes the land whole and hale, despite his wound. It is a tale of restoration.

But at the edge of the forest, outside the forest fence (which was not a fence, but a boundary of the King’s forest, inside which ordinary men were not allowed to hunt), there are other fantasies. They lurk in the shadow of the trees, yet often borrow forms from the sunlit lands beyond. They are creatures of the genre borderland, halflings or wolf children grown strange and wild. Here are three of them.

Triangulate Angela Carter, Samuel R. Delany and Gene Wolfe, and you’ll have defined the area in which Elizabeth Hand works her lush fantasies of catastrophe. *Glimmering* (HarperPrism, \$22; Voyager, £5.99) is an alternative history of the millennium, diverging from our history (neatly enough) on the date of its publication, when an ecological disaster strips the sky of its ozone layer and sets up the glimmering, which induces light storms and interferes with power generation and TV and radio transmission. Civilization is near collapse, and as the world lurches towards the end of the century some determine to celebrate with a last party while ecoterrorists and the folk of the fringe plan final acts of sabotage against the system.

The narrative switches between two strands, following protagonists who embody old and new values of artistic endeavour. John Finnegan (for this is a wake), dying of AIDS, has used up his family fortune to keep his literary magazine going, and finally allows himself to be bought out by a Japanese global corporation. As the magazine is revived, an old friend, Leonard Thrope, gives Finnegan a potential cure for AIDS he discovered in Tibet. Meanwhile, Trip Marlowe, a Christian rock star

## Outside the Forest Fence

Paul J. McAuley

as troubled and talented as Kurt Cobaine, is twice seduced in the secular chaos of New York, first by a mysterious young girl and then by Thrope. Addicted to the video-enhancing drug Thrope feeds him, Trip stumbles home and casts himself into the sea, but is rescued by Martin Dionysus, an old lover of Finnegan’s.

And so, by coincidence and the machinations of Leonard Thrope, the fates of the two protagonists are knit together. The girl who seduced Trip arrives at Finnegan’s home, now pregnant with Trip’s child. Meanwhile, Trip has persuaded Martin Dionysus to sail him to New York to search for the girl, and Finnegan, cured of AIDS but nevertheless gravely ill, travels there for the millennial party hosted by the Japanese

company, which promises to end the glimmering by a colossal feat of global engineering. The languid gestures of the narrative are at last gathered into a rapid denouement, in which the Christ of the millennial catastrophe fails to manifest, the morally dubious nature of the miraculous drug is revealed, and the folk of the fringe inherit the Earth.

Hand’s prose is sensuous and hallucinatory, mystifying rather than explaining; sometimes wilfully obscure, in fact, as if Hand is using a private set of symbols she’s reluctant to reveal to her readers. Although pivotal to the story, the opposing sides of the ecoterrorists and the well-meaning but menacing global corporation are both vaguely drawn: the ecoterrorists and their philosophy are barely glimpsed; the corporation seems to be no bigger than a medium-sized publisher.

But *Glimmering* is a vision rather than an account of the millennium. Just as Hand’s first two novels were set in an sf scenario (a future Washington D.C. after a series of catastrophes) but were narrated with the cadences of fantasy, her hard-sf explanation of ecological and sociological collapse is interlaced with fantasy tropes. The dead come back to haunt the living. The glimmering’s effects are capricious. Time slips, accelerates. New York becomes an almost uninhabitable ruin in only two years; a Tom Waits song from 1984 is recognized by 17-year-old Trip, in 1999, as an old folk song. *Glimmering* gathers together the fears of the millennium and transmutes them into a dream. It is a mourning, a letting go, a praise song for the new. It is good.

Diana Wynne Jones is best known for her children’s fantasies, such as *Archer’s Goon*, but she has written adult fantasy too, and *Deep Secret* (Gollancz, £16.99) is her latest. Like her previous novel, *A Sudden Wild Magic*, it is a story of the secret rulers of Earth. Here they are the Magids, who plan to move Earth along the axis of the multiverse (which is shaped like an infinity sign), from the side of negative magic to the side of positive magic. When one of the Magids dies it falls to the junior Magid, Rupert Venables, to find his successor; Rupert is also caught up in the search for the successor to the assassinated Emperor





of the troubled Koryfonic Empire. Rupert's search centres on four possible candidates. Conveniently, all attend a Fantasy Convention in a hotel built over a locus of magical power, but none seems particularly suitable, not even Maree Mallory, a troubled and headstrong young woman who has the most potential for magic. And then the Convention and Rupert's search are disrupted by the appearance of a centaur, a displaced climax to the search for the new Emperor, and a struggle against a plot to wrest control of Earth from the Magids.

Despite its loopy premise (which echoes the Time Lords of *Dr Who*), it is a swift-moving tale, propelled by its own peculiar but convincing logic in a complex plot in which no one is quite what they seems. The ending requires rather too many coincidences and unmaskings to be wholly believable, but the fantasy of magical powers is grounded in sharp observations of the real world, and in its sympathetically drawn cast of eccentrics. Despite some bloody moments, it is both charming and funny, and skims along on its own melting.

James Blaylock began his career with whimsical but straightforward Tolkienesque fantasy, and, like his confrere Tim Powers, has steadily moved through steampunk extravaganzas to contemporary fantasies. For those who have followed his career, *Winter Tides* (Ace, \$21.95) will not disappoint (although it will not surprise, either); for others it is a fine introduction to a writer more complex than he seems.

Like Blaylock's last half dozen novels, it is set in the present-day Pacific Edge of California, where travellers can go no further and all kinds of weirdness accumulates. Fifteen years before the main action of the novel, a surfer, Dave Quinn, attempted to rescue identical twin girls from the winter surf, but managed to save only one of them. Now, working as a carpenter for a theatrical company, the comfortable and undemanding life he has made for himself is punctured when the surviving twin, Ann, is compelled to return to the scene of the tragedy. Ann's sister Elinor, spiteful and powerful, still haunts her, and finds a willing collaborator in Edmund Dalton, who is plotting to wrest control of the company and its valuable land from his father and older brother.

In a plot that cleverly echoes *King Lear*, the play which the company is preparing, Dave and Ann find themselves united against the efforts of Edmund and Elinor. The nicely paced thriller is skilfully woven into the traditional ghost story of Elinor's haunting, and Blaylock's handling of his cast is both sympathetic and

deftly comic. Dave is a hero in spite of himself and Ann is more than his match; Edmund is both monstrous and foolish; Elinor is vindictively potent, yet pitiable. It seems that the more Blaylock moves away from the bosky theme park that has been built over the heart of the fantasy genre, the better he writes. We are lucky to have him.

Jointly gripping their favoured writing tool, William Barton and Michael Capobianco deepen the groove of that well-worn hard-sf trope, interstellar exploration. *Alpha Centauri* (Avon, \$23) is hard sf as in science at the foreground of the narration, and also as in arousal. More of the latter later.

It is the 23rd century. The Solar System is about to reach its carrying capacity. The population must either be pruned or must spread to the stars. A faction favouring the latter solution has financed a clutch of interstellar ships. The first reaches Alpha Centauri and discovers not one but three extinct alien races. What lessons do they have for embattled humanity?

The plot hinges upon the mystery of the aliens and the tensions within the crew – in particular, whether a double agent for an organization dedicated to sterilization of most of the human race will have his wicked way. There's much to enjoy. The uncovering of the lost history of the aliens is achieved through a powerful quantum device which can literally peer into the past. The three alien races are nicely differentiated, and are truly and complexly alien. The double agent's method of ensuring sterilization of the women he fucks is ingenious.

But the plausible science is mixed with banal characterization in which everyone is defined by childhood or adolescent trauma, and the story is saturated with sex. The problem is not the frequent graphic depictions of fucking (hey, we got over that with the New Wave), but that it resembles heterosexual male pornographic fantasies in that men are always rampant and women always compliant (so much so that the female captain, who has good reason to be wary of men, gives one of her bereaved crewmen a mercy fuck on the instant). There are two (male) gays, but despite the constant heterosexual sex we never get to see them in action.

And, as in all porn, sex occurs solely for the sake of satisfaction. Sex for reproduction is disturbing and dangerous. The double agent's sperm act like exocets against ova. The dominant alien race died out because its method of sexual reproduction was immensely complex. And of course reproduction got the human race into trouble in the first place. In the end, instead of exploring these

complex issues, the novel simply backs away from them like a confused adolescent, preferring instead its fantasy of zipless commitment-free fucks. The mystery gives everything up to the quantum gizmo which effortlessly penetrates it. What started out hard, ends limply.

James Patrick Kelly is a difficult writer to pin down to one particular form of genre writing, and in a genre obsessed with categorization his refusal to write the same tale over and over has put him at a disadvantage. That, and the fact that, like Howard Waldrop, he concentrates mostly on the short form – for while short stories once dominated the genre, novels now not merely confirm reputations, but break them. Which does not mean that the short story should be despised. Far from it. As John Kessel, Kelly's sometime collaborator, puts it in his perceptive introduction to Kelly's collection *Think Like a Dinosaur and Other Stories* (Golden Gryphon Press, \$22.95), "the short story is not a warm-up for a novel, or a lesser art form. And of my generation of sf writers, no one writes as wide a range of stories, from sf ('Breakaway, Backdown') to contemporary fantasy ('Dancing with the Chairs') to grim cautionary tales ('Pogram') to satire ('Mr Boy') to romance ('Faith') to horror ('Monsters') to comedy ('Standing in Line with Mr Jimmy')."

Indeed. And while Kessel's fiction is imbued with mainstream qualities such as character-led situations and a strong focus on emotional tension, it is also written from the heart of sf. "Think Like a Dinosaur" is a kind of talk-back to the argument of Tom Godwin's infamous short story "The Cold Equations," in which a girl stowing away aboard a shuttle on a rescue mission agrees to be ejected into space because otherwise her extra mass, not allowed for in orbital calculations, would cause the shuttle to burn up on atmospheric entry. Thus, confronting the unforgiving reality of the physical Universe precludes mere human morality. In Kelly's story, the consequences of interstellar teleportation (echoing Algis Budrys's *Rogue Moon*) must be addressed by a moral decision – if we are to be allowed to travel to the stars, we must learn to think like the aliens who gifted us with the technology, but at what human cost? The story won a deserved Hugo. The others collected here are by turns funny, excoriating, wry and unsettling. It is a fine collection published by a new imprint which continues editor Jim Turner's good work at Arkham House. Anyone with an interest in the continual honing of sf's cutting edge (that's all of you, right?) should read it.

Paul J. McAuley

Conjectural rumour has it that cockroaches and scorpions are two of the very few species that will scuttle freely in the post-apocalyptic dawn. These two creatures are suited to harsh conditions and terrains. A scorpion can be frozen in ice for hours, then thawed, and it will be able to move away afterwards; and I personally have witnessed a cockroach that had been crushed on the floor reassemble itself like Robocop and hobble to safety.

Science fiction, however, is the genre that best addresses the challenge of depicting a post-war landscape in which *human beings* are still the predominant life-form. Sf shows the sort of renegade mentality that is needed to survive a holocaust. In some respects, the war that has led up to the novel's first page is unimportant; the fact is that some humans have made it through alive: mutated maybe, but alive. Perhaps it is an arrogant assumption that humankind will have these reserves of resilience; but where would sf be without such arrogant assumptions? To the best of my knowledge, nobody has written a story from the point of view of cockroaches in the afterglow, although as Daniel Evan Weiss showed in *Unnatural Selection* (since reissued as *The Roaches Have No King*) it is possible to have a novel from the point of view of a cockroach, and even to drum up some sympathy for the horrible thing.

Iain Banks, with *A Song of Stone* (Abacus, £16.99), and Barry England, with *No Man's Land* (Cape, £14.99), have written novels in which wars – not necessarily nuclear, but devastating and analogous, nonetheless – have been raging for some time... Banks' novel is in his series of non-sf works, although it qualifies for inclusion because of the darkly fantastical feel achieved by its sense of rootlessness and timelessness; by its ambiguity. As the main character puts it: "I do not understand their war, nor know now who fights whom for what or why. This could be any place or time..." I was reminded throughout of Roman Polanski's version of *Death and the Maiden*; in that movie too there is the element of the alien and abstract, where everything is recognizable, but nothing is quite right. In *A Song of Stone* the reason for the conflict is not made clear, but what is obvious is that the mighty have already fallen because of it: the book is in the first person by a member of minor royalty who has been ousted from his position. Like Beowulf bemoaning days gone by, Abel here mourns the passing of the banquet-and-dance days in a measured, stately, old-fashioned prose. It is written to "you" – which makes the reader wonder why this second person should need to be

## Only the Strong Survive

David Mathew

reminded of so much, given that she saw the same conflict, unless she has been brain-damaged or injured in some other way.

Abel and "you" (the character Morgan, whose relationship with the former is also foggy, and increasingly disturbing) are running away from the castle that they have always inhabited. Their carriage is shanghaied by rebels who steal their weapons and force them to turn back. This is one of the few interesting twists in the early part of the book; when we think that it is going to be a quest novel of sorts, point A being left behind until the return at the end, it transpires that a good deal of *A Song of Stone's* plot will take place inside the castle walls, even if some of that is in Abel's flashbacks. The title actually refers to the castle – an adored piece of architecture. Abel is made a servant, while the rebel leader (a woman named "the lieutenant," or "Loot") takes a shine to Morgan.

So far, so so. Banks' rhythms are hypnotic, but at first the story seems poorly realized. In the same way that reading David Mamet is better if you adopt the gangster voice in your head, reading Banks is better if you are able to put on a Scottish brogue; but to begin with I couldn't help wondering if there shouldn't be more to the plot. The Sean Connery voice-overs in which we are treated to gobbets of portentous metaphysics are not enough. The long scene in which the rebels and deposed royals retrieve a gun which has fired a shell at the castle and damaged it is good but should have been shorter. The ambush made me think of scenes from an Oliver Stone Vietnam movie; and by these comparisons I hope to convey that Banks in this novel writes, if nothing else, extremely visually.

I think it might have been John Lennon who said that experience is what you get when you don't get what you want. As I was reading *A Song of Stone*, I was preparing what was to have been my review, and I

was going to end with the sentence: "I'll put *A Song of Stone* down to experience." But then something unexpected happened. About three-quarters of the way through, the book got better. Suddenly, threads came together that I hadn't realized had yet to be tied. The scenes of bacchanalia are splendid grotesques; the love-hate relationship (or the dependency) between Abel and the lieutenant takes unexpected turns, and that between the lieutenant and Morgan moves into dangerous territory. *A Song of Stone* becomes a Freudian tale in that much can be attributed to lust. Abel gets shot when he is caught spying on Loot and Morgan; it is assumed that he was going to shoot them first for Morgan's infidelity, but his reasons for being in the chamber are blacker. Soldiers lose their powers of restraint; there is a sort of *Grand Guignol* denouement in an abandoned windmill. And the elegiac ending makes up for the winter-morning slothful feeling of the beginning. I emerged from *A Song of Stone* thinking that it was a good novel that might have been an excellent novella.

Barry England's *No Man's Land* is a catch-your-breath military adventure set in a near future in which chaos holds court. John Savage is our Everyman – or our Action Man, our G.I. Joe. This cross between James Bond and Rambo has the unenviable task of commanding a brigade of would-be soldiers from a fortified safe house. Apocalypse – here known only as the Event – has been and gone. Millions of people have died. Daytimes are dark. Women can no longer bear children, to the relief of one character who is gang-raped by a trio of the bad guys in the book – the Scavengers. These Scavengers are ruthless pillagers whose *modus operandi* is to wreak havoc. John Savage's is to cleanse the land of this scum, rescuing who needs to be rescued. A woman named Anne and a child named Cassie are the two main rescuees. Savage is so protective of these two that it seems as though his tough veneer might be compromised. For Savage must never let his concentration slip:

He lay back in the bath.

A rare moment of respite.

Then he washed himself with the same meticulous attention to detail that he applied to the cleaning of his weapons.

Savage is obliged to take his charges to the Capital. This involves showing the women the finer points of weaponry and shooting, of provisions-packing and of inner resilience. The death toll is as high as in a Sven Hassel novel, but there

are no gratuitous details. This person is shot; then that person is shot. Such insouciance is a tad annoying. As is the occasional lack of psychological motivation.

Granted, Savage is the mind-piece of *No Man's Land*, but not enough is made of (for example) the after-effects of a teenaged girl's rape.

But on the whole this is a most enjoyable romp, particularly the scenes in the boat leading up to the entry to the Ashlands. It is the author's second novel, the first, *Figures in a Landscape* (1968), having been shortlisted for the Booker Prize and then made into a film. Barry England is better known as a stage and television playwright, and perhaps it is the necessary economy with words in these media that gives this novel its brevity and consequent boundless energy. It is Boy's Own stuff, but a rewarding trample through the reader's psyche.

Maybe the reason that sf has not yet offered the cockroach-in-the-meltdown story is that fantasy's hold on animals is still so strong. Horror fiction tried to take animals away for a while, and offered, in such novels as James Herbert's *The Rats*, examples of nature going insane; or, in the case of something like William Kotzwinkle's *Doctor Rat*, a darkly cynical fable. By and large, horror novels about animals present them as amoral and vicious – and the sub-genre ran hard against a brick wall, just as Splatterpunk did years later. Fantasy, on the other hand, tries to get inside the animal's head. The novels in this batch which are from the point of view of animals do not show catastrophes as much as they show the ways in which it is assumed the catastrophes might be avoided. Gabriel King's *The Wild Road* (Arrow, £5.99) and Garry Kilworth's *The Welkin Weasels: Thunder Oak* (Corgi, £4.99) are quest novels, about cats and weasels respectively.

Cats have inspired some serious acts of devotion in the past, not least in the way that they are still regarded with mythological, quasi-religious status by some cultures. Every chapter of *The Wild Road*, furthermore, is headed by a brief quote from some admirers of felines – such as Wilde, da Vinci, Twain, Einstein and Doris Lessing. William Burroughs wrote a book called *The Cat Inside*, and even Freddie Mercury had on one of his band's albums a song about his own moggy. In *The Wild Road*, a young cat is chosen by an old and wise cat to undertake a mission that will have him navigating some mystical, ethereal walkways in order to prevent an evil human (The Alchemist) from doing the same and in so doing learning the true nature

and secrets of felinekind: "The Alchemist has spent three hundred years looking for the key to the highway. He is close..." If he finds it, felinekind is doomed. Assistance comes from a variety of other cats, each – Gabriel King is determined to prove a point here – with a distinct and individual personality: the New Orleans/Creole vamp; the insane cat with a sparkplug in her head; the gorgimey-guvnor Londoner.

This sort of insistence is at the root of my difficulties with *The Wild Road*. Gabriel King is so intent in telling us everything there is to know about cats that he is simply trying too hard. I learnt plenty about King's theories of cats, and should I ever be reincarnated as one I'll try to remember which bits of a rat should and should not be eaten. (Tip: avoid the eyes.) Many novels about animals are for children, but *The Wild Road* isn't, being far too long and complicated. "Stuff you" is substituted for any other more adult equivalent, but apart from toning down the swearing, there are very few concessions made for children. This is a book for fantasy-and-cat-lovers; for the people who bought Tad Williams's *Tailchaser's Song*. If you believe that cats really do have nine lives, this is one for you. The writing is of a high standard, but I think *The Wild Road* takes itself far too seriously.

Much better is Garry Kilworth's *Welkin Weasels*. This is a lot simpler in the telling, with a children's audience in mind. Important facts are repeated and difficult words are subtly defined. Human beings have left Welkin and animals have taken over their property; for most, this is an agreeable situation – but Sylver, the leader of a gang of renegade weasels, believes that the

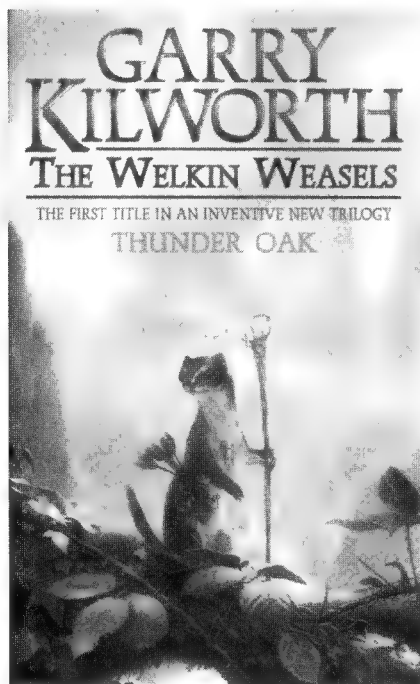
humans are needed back because only they are able to mend the sea-walls that are rapidly crumbling. The weasels set out to find humans who will undertake the task, the alternative being to let the sea eventually sweep everything away. There are some excellent touches: the statues that move and talk now that the humans have left and they do not need to pretend any more; the religious creature of the Order of the Drum who is dressed in robes so baggy that he claims not to remember what his earthly form resembles (although the identity becomes clear a little later). A hog tries to fatten the weasels up with the purpose in mind of skinning them – which has comparisons with both Homer and with the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel."

Indeed, although *The Welkin Weasels* has been allotted a reading age of 9+, there are enough allusions to amuse any literate fantasy-reading adult. There are references to a "mad monk" and to *The Battle of Maldon*, to name but two. Like Clive Barker's *The Thief of Always* or Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, it might be argued that *The Welkin Weasels* is something of a children's story for adults too.

The book follows fairly standard quest lines: a proposal, the beginning, the taking-on of new recruits, adventures, separation, individual adventures, reunion, adventures and resolution. But there is a charm and wit to the story that is warming. Sylver gets sold into slavery; some of the other weasels get trapped in the bodies of humans and then rabbits, Kilworth here providing sly references to the concepts of determinism and free will. An eagle hunts two weasels who parachute off the side of a mountain using halves of a stolen eggshell; one of these weasels falls into a wacky sect of religious hedgehogs who believe that the Great God Spike has delivered her to them. By the end of the book, the weasels have narrowed down the humans' location to "a small island somewhere in the Cobalt Sea." First class, brisk-reading entertainment.

On occasion I have been of the opinion that authors who write animal novels (particularly under a pseudonym, as is the case with the King) are akin to comedians who take the easy money to present tacky quiz shows. That opinion is not valid for either *The Wild Road* or *The Welkin Weasels* because it is obvious that both Gabriel King and Garry Kilworth believe in their subjects. Both books end with at least another volume pending. The cataclysm must be prevented; for neither cats nor weasels will survive their respective apocalypses. Only stronger creatures will.

David Mathew



This is a carping column. All the books considered display, at least intermittently, a very high standard of execution; and all are to a greater or lesser extent conceptually flawed.

It's surprising that Alfred Bester should be universally recognized as one of the sf greats, less because his output of seven novels (of which two aren't sf) and two slim volumes of short stories is meagre, than because of that meagre output much is second-rate or derivative. After *The Demolished Man* and *Tiger! Tiger!* came *Extro*, a lacklustre pastiche of Roger Zelazny, and *Golem 100*, an explicit homage to R. A. Lafferty which featured all Lafferty's vices and none of his virtues. His last novel was passed over in embarrassed silence.

Yet his reputation refuses to fade, so Vintage has now produced the foolishly entitled *Virtual Unrealities: The Short Fiction of Alfred Bester* (\$14). It is not, as implied, a collected edition but a selection introduced by Robert Silverberg. The contents overlap the two earlier collections, *Starburst* and *The Dark Side of the Earth*, without containing the whole of either, but there are three additional items, of which two are less good than those omitted. I'd far rather have seen a definitive edition of the short sf and fantasy in order of composition (in so far as can be established or guessed). If you already have both the earlier collections this isn't good value.

The very best Bester is written with astonishing verve, but his focus is narrow. Stories tend to concern people with extraordinary powers of one kind or another, which are to a greater or lesser extent beyond their understanding and control; there is often a character who speaks in a highly idiosyncratic fashion as well, and hints of a Faustian bargain, which may have been imposed unwillingly, or by chance, or agreed and then forgotten. So go the first four in the book, which are also four of my favourites: "Disappearing Act," "Oddly and Id," "Star Light, Star Bright" and "5,271,009" (aka "The Starcomber"). All are heavily ornamented with a quite individual wit; no one but Bester would have thought to introduce a character with a heavy lisp, just so as to make him say at one point, "But the boy hath the power of the miracle. When he hath been taught to know what he doth, he will be a God."

A few writers have come close to writing like Bester: Fritz Leiber's "Little Old Miss Macbeth" touches one end of his range, Robert Sheckley's "A Ticket to Tranai" the other. Both are witty and beautifully constructed, and in both the sub-surface Faustian element is insistently present, but both are quiet in tone. Bester maintains perfect control of a

## High Standards of Execution

Chris Gilmore

downright raucous tone, and on that, far more than on his thematic preoccupations or occasional typographical experiments, rests his claim to uniqueness.

Not all the stories are as good as the four mentioned, or the equally brilliant "The Pi Man" and "Fondly Fahrenheit" (which I last praised just a couple of months back): "Time is the Traitor" contains too many absurdities, and telegraphs its punchline; "They Don't Make Life Like They Used To" is a beautifully written extended joke whose point I still don't get after at least four readings over three decades, and I suspect Bester was unhappy with it as well – why else introduce aliens only in the last two pages? "Of Time and Third Avenue," in which the bargain is rejected, undermines its own point, while the point of "Will You Wait?" is accessible enough, but laboured.

By contrast, that of "The Flowered Thundermug" has if anything sharpened with time, that of "The Men Who Murdered Mohammed" is as fresh as ever and so is "Galatea Galante," a Shavian spoof, and the only considerable story not in either previous collection. It's so delicious all the way through that I had to forgo the concluding *deus ex machina*.

That makes nine wonderful stories at \$1.55 each – ten at \$1.40, if you can suss "They Don't Make Life..." Marvellous value, pending a definitive edition, and if you haven't both the other collections.

I once met a woman who lectured in Eng Lit at a dim London polytechnic. She admired Andrea Dworkin, on whose body she had apparently remodelled her own, and regarded it as the most telling indictment of phallo-/euro-centric capitalism that there are no supermodels of her general shape but plenty of the sylph-like persuasion. She also held that, because she never wrote about a black woman, the works of Jane Austen could have

nothing to offer black women.

Her error was gross, not to say racist, but I wonder if those who write and publish books specifically for and about teenagers may not be guilty of something similar on a lesser scale. It seems to me that at 13 you may well lack the background and experience to tackle *Mansfield Park* or *Middlemarch*, but by the time you have begun puberty you should be able to appreciate a light adult novel such as (for instance) *Headlong Hall* or *Doctor in the House*, both of which I enjoyed as a pimply adolescent. I vaguely recall some saccharine tales of unconsummated first love set in pony clubs or co-ed grammar schools, though only one, that I read much later, had any merit at all: Ursula Le Guin's *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else*. But Dolphin has perceived a niche, and embarked on a series of short novels by sundry hands at £9.99 & £3.50 each, generically entitled "The Web," and set in a shared version of the year 2027.

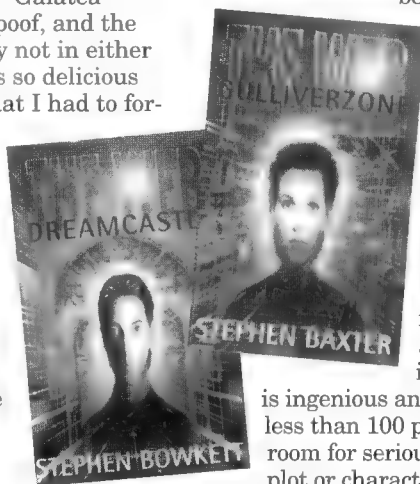
The first, Stephen Bowkett's *Dreamcastle*, is a science fantasy based on the entirely reasonable premise that if VR games ever get to be as good as promised, nerdy kids of both sexes will play obsessively, to the detriment of their schoolwork, physique and (most of all) grip on reality. After *Dream Park*, why not? The castle of the title is the locale for one such game, and it has by means never made clear generated an Evil Force, which is not only capable of killing you for real while playing, but can to a limited extent invade the outside world with dreams and hallucinations.

Surfer, the youthful hero, is the most besotted and thus the

most vulnerable of the three principal characters, so Kilroy, his girlfriend, and Rom, his sidekick, must set about saving him from himself on his enemy's ground. The book is better written than much *soi-disant* adult fare, and the invented Web slang

is ingenious and convincing, but at less than 100 pages there's no room for serious development of plot or character, and the moral is obvious – for those interested, Chapter 1 of Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars* makes the same point a whole lot quicker.

The second, Stephen Baxter's *Gulliverzone*, is a little longer and has much the same virtues and defects. Sarah (aka Metaphor) and brother George (aka Byte), whose relationship is that of a younger Podkayne and Clark, go on what should be a moderately enjoyable excursion into





the VR environment of the title, only to find that it, too, is a cover for an Evil Force with malevolent intentions towards absolutely everyone. Beneath the pretty-pretty facade down-loaded personalities and viruses have evolved to self-awareness are waging a war of extermination. Sarah and George get caught up in it, and have no option but to choose their side.

The tale is fast-moving with some clever touches; the moral, when it comes, is unexceptionable but again somewhat pious and crudely rammed home. That more than anything raises the question, who are these books for? Children as old as the principals will surely have gone onto something more adult unless they are either thoroughly unliterary, not very bright or both; those much younger will find the jargon too difficult. There's probably a band in the 9-11 range for which they're just right, but they won't stay right for long.

And now for something completely different. Modern writers approaching famous legends frequently choose to re-interpret them in ways ranging from the strikingly original to the studiously perverse. One thinks of Mary Renault's brilliant use of Theseus's internal tension, being forced to regard himself as the son of both Poseidon and Aegeus, and Robert Graves's assertion that Orpheus was far too self-disciplined a poet to look back before it was safe. Rather, he waited until he was in clear daylight, but when he at last looked round he found that Eurydice had never set out, preferring the company of the demon-god Hades.

The Arthurian cycle has been subject to this sort of special pleading as much as any other, but never so fundamentally as by Haydn Middleton in his "Mordred Cycle," comprising *The King's Evil* (Warner, £5.99), *The Queen's Captive* (Warner, £5.99) and *The Knight's Vengeance* (Little, Brown, £16.99). The series title suggests a rather trivial re-working with Mordred as the good guy, but Middleton has actually done something a lot more interesting and a whole lot more complex. His chosen approach to the cycle involves reworking it as if it were the screenplay for an extreme form of *film noir*, while including only the most cursory references to the familiar stories which make it up. Instead he maximizes the mythic element, so as to create an extended parable verging upon allegory whose import is, to put it mildly, obscure.

This Albion is a land of scattered

settlements, whose few inhabitants are haunted by the Roman remains (which they attribute to a vanished race of giants) and the heroic chalk figures, mainly of fertility gods, which bestride the hillsides and which they take to represent the giants themselves. Moreover (and in a sense correctly), they believe themselves to be descended from the giants, which renders their theological status (in terms of their new and uncomfortable Christianity) equivocal at best.

Angst enough for anyone, but for Mordred, growing up mute from birth until his mid-teens in the brutish court of King Lot, more than most; for he is pursued from the first by the book's primary symbol, which is "blood without cuts." It's a protean symbol, which can evoke menstruation, childbirth, the Eucharist, the First Plague of Egypt, or (with descending dignity) pulmonary tuberculosis, sundry intestinal dysfunctions and piles.

The violence done to the legend cannot be over-emphasized. Mordred's emotional baggage includes not only the knowledge that he is the child of incest, but that Arthur conducted his own Slaughter of the Innocents in order to get rid of him. With the bad luck that traditionally attends such enterprises, Mordred was, like Moses and Jesus, the only survivor, having been rescued by mistake. His quest to confront his father ends, not in mere tragedy, but in a universal calamity from which emerges the new but deeply unsatisfactory world of Logres, into which all the characters are, in various guises, reborn.

For me the problems are that if you overwhelm with an insistent image, your imagery must perforce be repetitive; if you ally that with a mood of unremitting, sombre squalor, the effect is going to be depressing after a while; if you impose a sense of

ineluctable and gruesome destiny on everyone, realism commands that an atmosphere of fatalistic accidie should ensue; and if you essay a radical new approach to a well-known cycle you ought not to change too many variables at once. Middleton is obviously playing a system here, and I'm prepared to believe he's playing it with integrity; but it's too complex for what little of the original framework remains, so that the effect is both strained and arbitrary. Of course, those who like this sort of thing will be prepared to put more effort into it than I, who did not; though I have to admit that Middleton's constant evocations of fear, loathing and disgust, especially in the many episodes of hyperbolically

bad sex, are extremely well done.

Anyone interested would be well advised to borrow *The King's Evil* from a library first. Those who love it should then buy the whole sequence, in hardback; rarely will you meet its like. Those who hate it need feel no shame – involuntarily melancholia may be fun, but it's an acquired taste.

Well, there's this incomprehensibly advanced race in the future, see, and they've invented time-travel, like, and they're now scared s\*\*\*less that someone else will invent it as well, and go back to do something that'll stop them from ever existing at all. (Exactly what difference that would make to them is an interesting ontological question, not to be addressed here.) So they recruit, according to a rationale never made very clear, a whole load of people from just anywhere and anywhen, who get the job of keeping things the way they are; but some of them go native and ask would it really be so a bad to avert (as someone puts it in the current offering) "A child dying needlessly, a grand nation dismembered? A lovely creature's looks destroyed by plague, a city vaporized?"

Hence *The End of Eternity* (Asimov), *The Big Time* (Leiber), John Brunner's Miguel Navarro stories and, most insistently, Poul Anderson's *Guardians of Time*. In lifting this idea for *Days of Cain* (Avon, \$23) J. R. Dunn has chosen to join distinguished company, which requires that his book be judged to the highest standards. I'll say at once that he finds no new answers to the two underlying moral questions: "Can one, by evil means, ever hope to bring about good ends?" and "Can one make a valid moral distinction between committing an evil act oneself, and permitting another to commit that act?" Not his fault – there are no new answers; one can only refine a position. I'll also say now that Dunn's use of English is impeccable, though not especially individual; he deserves a place, though not the highest place, in his chosen company.

On this occasion the wild operator, Anna Lewin, has gathered a like-minded group, all dedicated to the proposition that the Holocaust was an event of such frightfulness as to taint all future time; wherefrom it follows that if it could only be cancelled, the unfolding universe must of necessity be better. Gaspar James, her original mentor, must thwart her in order to preserve the status quo, for the massive intelligences upline regard the Holocaust as pivotal: it confronted mankind with its own prodigious capacity for evil, and forced it to learn self-control. The opportunities for external and internal conflict are no less valid for being obvious, though Dunn presents a curiously broken symmetry.



The book is written from the viewpoints of Gaspar, Rebeka (an inmate of Birkenau) and Reber, a Waffen-SS officer who holds an administrative post there and who has the instinct but not the courage to mitigate its horrors. Anna appears only from Rebeka's viewpoint, which greatly reduces her impact. Because the custom-made hells which confront these

three as the book proceeds to its climax are extremely well detailed, and because Dunn's characterization is so excellent, it's all the more regrettable that he flinches from portraying Anna from the inside. Moreover, the actual story is far too slight to carry so much weighty ornamentation. That Anna's mission is inherently hopeless is telegraphed, so that the

reader's suspense consists entirely of wondering who will survive and in what condition. It says much for Dunn's writing that this was sufficient to keep me turning the pages avidly to the end, but I still put the book down feeling slightly cheated – I really must make time to re-read Anderson and Brunner...

Chris Gilmore

Rumours have circulated for years of the imminent appearance of a sequel to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, but the new novel, *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* (Orbit, £16.99), was apparently left unfinished on Walter M. Miller's death in 1996. The manuscript was completed and presumably edited by Terry Bisson whose first two novels bear thematically on the present one: *Wyrdmaker* (1981) in containing a legendary and elusive woman, and *Talking Man* (1986) in dealing with a transformed US landscape.

*Saint Leibowitz* grows out of a specific section of *A Canticle* which describes a new Dark Age in America. The period is the 32nd century. The USA has fragmented into a number of different tribal areas all with their distinct languages and cultures. The landscape is still marked with the traces of nuclear holocaust. A pit is named Meldown (i.e. "meltdown"); areas are populated by "gennies", i.e. the genetically handicapped mutants reminiscent of the post-holocaust figures who populate the early fiction of Poul Anderson and Judith Merril. Miller himself described his new work as being a "novel about a pope, a nomad chieftain and a goddess who happens to be a horse". As in *A Canticle* precarious cultural connections are maintained by the Catholic monasteries although the authority of the Church remains an open issue throughout the novel which describes the power groups competing for the election of a new pope. The protagonist of *Saint Leibowitz* is a young novice monk named Brother Blacktooth whose fortunes shadow those of an elusive older figure introduced as the Red Deacon who becomes the Vicar Apostolic for the area and who coordinates the nomadic tribes' uprising against the empire of Texarkana which dominates the region. A large proportion of the novel describes the journeys to and fro across the landscape by Brother Blacktooth and the Red Deacon on political missions.

During one of these Blacktooth meets and falls in love with a "genny" named Aedrea and the love-motif of the novel traces out their encounters and separations. The Red Deacon has no equivalent lover but he has to undergo a ritual courting of the legendary Wild Horse Woman, who is reportedly glimpsed around the region, at Meldown which is described as the "navel of the world". We only

learn about this from a distance because Blacktooth supplies our main perspective on events with all the limitations his youth and lack of worldly experience carries. He witnesses debates about the ethics of war, the rival claims of religious and temporal power, and also experiences religious visions where the dead apparently communicate with him. The world of the novel then is one of ferment and change. The nomadic peoples are putting up fences around their lands while the novel shows a hospitality to spiritual vision. The secular authority of the state is shifting and the imperial city of Texarkana is besieged and taken after a long epic march by the nomads. Being focused through Blacktooth, much of the action consists of a sequence of adventures in the most literal sense of the term as chance or unexpected happenings, set within a chronicle-like frame through formulations such as "thus it came about that ..."

When Miller was revising his three "canticles" for publication as his first

## The Sequel to Leibowitz

David Seed

### SAINT LEIBOWITZ AND THE WILD HORSE WOMAN



WALTER M.  
MILLER, JR.

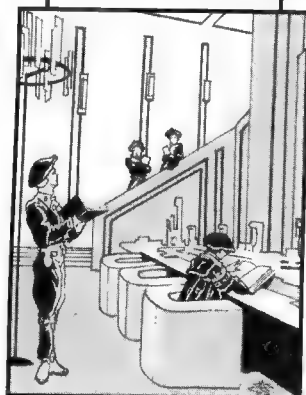
Author of the majestic science fiction classic  
A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ

novel he increased the number of historical references, for instance introducing in the third section instances from contemporary politics to juxtapose with the continuous authority of the church from an earlier age. These revisions invite the reader to compare elements from different historical periods, to consider for example possible analogies between the voluntary euthanasia for the worst radiation casualties and the Nazis' programme of the 1930s. This process is largely absent from *Saint Leibowitz* although the novel describes a number of historical changes like the introduction of the repeating rifle and revolver. In *A Canticle* Miller speculated at length about how written records might be preserved and passed down to later ages, but in the new novel this becomes a minor issue only. At the beginning Blacktooth has been drawn unwillingly into the project of creating a library of nomadic texts but this task is relegated to the boring duties of the abbey which he is only too willing to leave behind for his travels with the Red Deacon.

Cultural memory, even if it only involves preserving the jumbled and incomprehensible "memorabilia" of Leibowitz, bears in the first novel on Miller's notion of recurrence, that humanity might be locked into a cycle of events that they are doomed to repeat. We start in the aftermath of a nuclear war and end with a new nuclear exchange. *Saint Leibowitz*, by contrast, makes no reference to such large-scale cycles and instead conflates aspects of different periods into an action that is orderly, linear, and one which could be read as an account of Blacktooth's growth to manhood. Here Miller combines Catholic schism, Western adventure, and the downfall of empires in a fast-paced narrative whose sheer eventfulness prevents the thoughtful pauses that are invited by *A Canticle*. And finally, the fact that the new novel is a sequel means that willy-nilly we are on the lookout for echoes of the earlier novel. The Wandering Jew makes a brief appearance to repeat his earlier role of sardonic commentator on Christianity. The buzzards reappear as reminders of mortality and even the "bookleggers" get a mention. These reminders do nothing for the new novel because they only underline the thinness of its central ideas and narrative compared with *A Canticle*.

David Seed

# BOOKS RECEIVED



SEPTEMBER 1997

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Bova, Ben. **Moonwar: Book II of the Moonbase Saga.** Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-68250-7, 531pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997.) 16th October 1997.

Brooks, Terry. **Running with the Demon.** "A Novel of Good and Evil." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-574-6, 420pp, hardcover, cover by Brom, £16.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) 30th October 1997.

Burns, Cliff. **The Reality Machine (Tales of the Immediate Future).** Introduction by Kim Newman. Black Dog Press [1142 105th St., North Battleford, SK S9A 1S6, Canada], ISBN 0-9694853-2-8, xii+121pp, small-press paperback [with dust-jacket], cover by Clarence Holbrook Carter, \$16.95 US, \$18.95 Canadian. (Sf/horror collection, first edition; it contains 15 short pieces by this Canadian small-press author who has been praised widely; a previous collection of his was entitled *Sex*

& Other Acts of the Imagination [1991].) 30th September 1997.

Clark, Simon. **King Blood.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-66062-7, 534pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1997.) 16th October 1997.

Duane, Diane. **The Book of Night with Moon.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-69329-0, viii+404pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick Posen, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1997; it's described as an "epic fantasy about super-intelligent cats.") No date shown: received in September 1997.

Duncan, Dave. **Present Tense: Round Two of the Great Game.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14500-9, 479pp, A-format paperback, cover by Geoff Taylor, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 13th November 1997.

Elliott, John. **Elliott's Guide to Home Entertainment.** 4th edition. "The authoritative guide to over 10,500 films and feature-length dramas released in cinemas, on video, or on satellite and cable TV." Aurum Press, ISBN 1-85410-485-3, xix+954pp, C-format paperback, £12.99. (A-Z film guide, with star ratings; no dates are given for the previous three editions, none of which we saw; where this volume supposedly scores over similar-looking movie guides is in its coverage of "made-for-TV mini-series and feature-length TV dramas"; however, in his keenness to keep up to date, the author admits that many older items have been dropped from this edition; on checking *The Day of the Triffids*, I find that the lousy old early-1960s movie version is still listed, though the rather good 1981 BBC TV serialization is not; there are similar lacunae elsewhere [e.g. no listing of the BBC serial of Wells's *The Invisible Man*, which was more faithful to the novel than the 1930s cinema version]; I have a suggestion: in the next edition, why not drop all the theatrically-released feature films [already covered in a hundred-and-one other books] and reinstate the deleted entries for

all the older TV movies, serials and mini-series?; then this would be a genuinely useful reference work which would cover an area that no one else seems to tackle in depth, namely the oft-maligned TV-film product – which, after all, draws the biggest [though perhaps not the trendiest] audiences.) No date shown: received in September 1997.

Goonan, Kathleen Ann. **Mississippi Blues.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85917-1, 511pp, hardcover, \$25.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the sequel to the author's highly-praised debut novel, *Queen City Jazz*, it concerns a world transformed by nanotechnology.) December 1997.

Gotlieb, Phyllis. **Flesh and Gold.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86523-6, 287pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the first new novel in many years from the *grande dame* of Canadian sf [born 1926]; Ursula Le Guin commends it on the back cover.) February 1998.

Grant, John, and Ron Tiner. **The Encyclopedia of Fantasy and Science Fiction Art Techniques.** "A comprehensive A-to-Z directory of techniques, with an inspirational gallery of finished works." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-891-0, 276pp, large-format paperback, £12.99. (Copiously illustrated "how-to" book on fantasy art; first published in 1996 [we never saw the hardcover]; it seems to be well done: recommended to aspiring illustrators.) 17th October 1997.

Gray, Muriel. **Furnace.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-225313-5, 338pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a second novel by this Glaswegian lady – better known in Britain as an arts broadcaster.) 20th October 1997.

Haderack, J. K. **Mercer's Whore.** "An epic fantasy." Ripping Publishing [PO Box 286, Epsom, Surrey KT19 9YG], ISBN 1-899884-19-X, 375pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new

British writer [not young – he has been married for 28 years and has a grandchild], it's copyright "Joseph Delaney, 1997.") 10th September 1997.

Hall, Hal W., ed. **Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index, 1992-1995: An International Author and Subject Index to History and Criticism.** Libraries Unlimited [P.O. Box 6633, Englewood, CO 80155-6633, USA], ISBN 1-56308-527-5, xxi+503pp, hardcover, \$90. (Index to criticism and comment on sf/fantasy, first edition; it supplements two earlier large volumes, *Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index, 1878-1984* and *Science Fiction and Fantasy Reference Index, 1986-1991*; although it would appear to cover only four years of sf scholarship, the new book does in fact contain some entries on older material which was overlooked in the earlier volumes; criticism of sf and fantasy has continued to grow, so this book will be very useful for anyone researching the subjects; recommended to all librarians, academics, critics and commentators.) No date shown: 1997 publication, received in September 1997.

Holston, Kim R., and Tom Winchester. **Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Film Sequels, Series and Remakes: An Illustrated Filmography, with Plot Synopses and Critical Commentary.** Foreword by Ingrid Pitt. McFarland [distributed in Britain by Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gdns., Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN], ISBN 0-7864-0155-9, vi+601pp, hardcover, £67.50. (A-Z of sf/fantasy/horror films; first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American edition with a British price added; the sub-title describes it exactly: another useful book from this pricy but valuable publisher; recommended; like so many cinema reference works, however, it doesn't take television movies, serials and mini-series into account [e.g. there are no entries for *Rosemary's Baby* or *The Stepford Wives*, which were sequelized extensively but only on TV]; it's surprising

how TV is still the poor relation when it comes to such listings and studies – there seems to be an eager market for books on *The Avengers* and suchlike segmented series, but there is a distinct paucity of reference works on TV movies and serials [see comments above, under John Elliott].) 20th November 1997.

Holt, Tom. **The Walled Orchard.** Warner, ISBN 0-7515-2138-8, 591pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Historical-novel omnibus, first edition; set in ancient Athens, and narrated by the comedian Eupolis, the two novels were originally published separately as *Goatsong* [1989] and *The Walled Orchard* [1990]; they are not Holt's usual comic fantasy, but serious [though also humorous] historical fiction in which the author deploys his considerable Classical knowledge; recommended.) 4th December 1997.

Irwin, Robert. **Prayer-Cushions of the Flesh.** Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-63-1, 140pp, B-format paperback, cover by Jules Migonney, £6.99. ("Oriental" erotic fantasy novel, first edition.) 2nd October 1997.

Jones, Gwyneth. **Phoenix Café.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86534-1, 350pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1997; proof copy received; a follow-up to the author's highly-praised *White Queen* and *North Wind*, set in 23rd-century Paris; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 118.) January 1998.

Jones, J. V. **The Barbed Coil.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-510-X, 612pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997; J. V. Jones [Julie Victoria Jones, not to be confused with Jenny Jones] is a relatively new British author, born 1963, now living in California; this is her fourth novel and appears to be a singleton, i.e. it is unrelated to her "Book of Words" trilogy [see the following entry].) 23rd October 1997.

Jones, J. V. **Master and Fool.** "The Book of Words, Volume III." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-471-5, 688pp, A-format paperback, cover by Darrell K. Sweet,

£6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 23rd October 1997.

Jones, Jenny. **Where the Children Cry.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06157-X, 384pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; it's a ghost story set in present-day York; unfortunately, the title makes it sound like a thriller by American writer Mary Higgins Clark [*Where Are the Children?*, *A Cry in the Night*, etc.].) 5th February 1998.

Knight, Damon. **Humpty Dumpty: An Oval.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86383-7, 287pp, trade paperback, \$13.95. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; it "may turn out to be the novel Knight is remembered for," said a *Locus* reviewer.) 12th September 1997.

Kosko, Bart. **Nanotime.** Avon, ISBN 0-380-97466-5, 311pp, hardcover, \$24. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut novel by the Californian academic and musician best known for his non-fiction work *Fuzzy Thinking*; with this new book, the publishers tell us, he "goes beyond the armchair insights of William Gibson and Tom Clancy to create a riveting thriller that only a warrior of the information age could write"; it's set in the year 2030, but the philosopher John Stuart Mill appears as a "software ghost" character; there's an eight-page "selected bibliography" at the back of the book, and a map of the Middle East at the front.) 8th October 1997.

Kress, Nancy. **Maximum Light.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86535-X, 245pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; another "bio-thriller," in similar vein to the author's *Oaths and Miracles* – though not, apparently, linked.) January 1998.

McAuley, Paul J. **The Invisible Country.** Introduction by Kim Newman. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60189-2, 319pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in 1996; McAuley's second collection, it contains nine excellent stories, including three from *Inter-*

zone ["Gene Wars," "Dr Luther's Assistant" and "The True History of Dr Preto-rus"]; the others come from such sources as *F&SF*, *New Worlds*, *New Legends* and *Omni Online*; reviewed by Pete Crowther in *IZ* 123.) 25th September 1997.

McKenzie, Nancy. **The High Queen: The Tale of Guinevere and King Arthur Continues.** Legend, ISBN 0-09-922472-0, 430pp, A-format paperback, cover by Paul Young, £5.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1995; first UK edition of the second volume in a trilogy which seems to have found some success in America.) 18th September 1997.

Mohan, Kim, ed. **More Amazing Stories.** "The very last issue of *Amazing Stories*!" Tor, ISBN 0-312-86473-6, 320pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; proof copy received; the veteran *Amazing* [founded in 1926] ceased publication in 1996; this book, put together by its last editor, consists in the main of "leftover" material, with stories by Eleanor Arnason, Gregory Benford, Philip K. Dick [a reprint from 1953], Ursula Le Guin, John Morressy, Linda Nagata, Nancy Springer, Howard Waldrop, Don Webb and others; there is also an essay by Robert Silverberg, on Philip K. Dick.) January 1998.

Plowright, Frank, ed. **The Slings & Arrows Comic Guide.** "A Critical Assessment of Over 2,500 Titles." Aurum Press, ISBN 1-85410-486-1, xiii+687pp, C-format paperback, cover by Frank Quitely, £16.95. (A-Z critique of comic books by title, from the 1930s to the present; first edition; this volume is completely unillustrated, but contains a solid amount of text and looks to be an extremely useful reference guide to a massive and complex field; recommended.) 25th September 1997.

Pratchett, Terry. **Hogfather.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14542-4, 445pp, A-format paperback, cover by Josh Kirby, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1996; the 20th

"Discworld" novel, and the fattest paperback in that series we have seen so far [they keep blowing up the print size]; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 118.) 13th November 1997.

Rosendorfer, Herbert. **Letters Back to Ancient China.** Translated by Mike Mitchell. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-97-6, 274pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Bird, £9.99. (Sf novel, first published in Germany, 1983; this, which the publishers inform us has sold over a million copies in German, is a European sf satire of a very traditional sort: about a medieval Chinese mandarin whose time-travel device strands him in modern Germany, and who writes "letters home" about his strange experiences, it's clearly inspired by such proto-sf works as *Lettres persanes* by Charles de Secondat Montesquieu [1721] and *Les Voyages de Kang-Hi, ou nouvelles lettres chinoises* by Pierre-Marc Gaston, Duc de Lévis [1810].) 2nd October 1997.

Sagan, Carl. **Contact: A Novel.** "The Number 1 Bestseller." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-580-0, 431pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985; this is the movie tie-in reissue; an author's afterword which Sagan wrote a dozen years ago states: "this book has grown out of a treatment for a motion picture that Ann Druyan and I wrote in 1980-81"; well, it took the best part of two decades for the film to get made.) 2nd October 1997.

Shinerock, Simon M. **The Dark Lagoon.** "A Dark Fantasy." Ripping Publishing [PO Box 286, Epsom, Surrey KT19 9YG], ISBN 1-899884-18-1, 412pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer [born 1957].) 10th September 1997.

Shinn, Sharon. **Jovah's Angel.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648258-9, 389pp, A-format paperback, cover by Chris Baker, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; sequel to *Archangel*.) 6th October 1997.



Silverberg, Robert. **Sorcerers of Majipoor**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-34269-X, 629pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99.

(Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; it was probably Robert Silverberg who began the recent trend for serious sf writers to attempt to revitalize their careers sales-wise by writing fantasy-lookalike trilogies, usually in planetary-romance form; British writers who have followed suit include Brian Aldiss ["Helliconia"], Ian Watson ["Book of the River"], Bob Shaw ["Ragged Astronauts"], Brian Stableford ["Genesys"] and, most recently, Paul J. McAuley ["Confluence"]; but Silverberg has now extended his original "Majipoor" trilogy to five volumes.) 10th October 1997.

Somtow, S. P. **Darker Angels**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06122-7,

Anderson, Kevin J. **Antibodies**. "The X-Files." Voyager, ISBN 0-00-224638-4, 277pp, hardcover, cover by Tony Mauro, £16.99. (Sf/horror TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; based on the characters created by writer-producer Chris Carter; this is the fifth "X-Files" adult spinoff novel – the first two, *Goblins* and *Whirlwind*, were by Charles Grant, and the second two, *Ground Zero* and *Ruins*, were by Anderson.) 15th September 1997.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **The Mammoth Book of New Sherlock Holmes Adventures**. Foreword by Richard Lancelyn Green. Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-528-0, xv+524pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Historical crime-fiction anthology, first edition; strictly speaking, this piece of Conan Doyle spinoffery does not fall within our province, but in fact it's well worth bringing to *Interzone* readers' attention since it contains original stories by, among others, Stephen Baxter, Eric Brown, Simon Clark, Basil Copper, Peter Crowther, David Langford, Michael Moorcock, Guy N. Smith, and Robert Weinberg & Lois H. Gresh; crime writers such as Edward

351pp, hardcover, cover by Max Schindler, £16.99. (Historical horror novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received.) 20th November 1997.

Starbuck, Kathlyn S. **The House at the Top of the Hill**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648276-7, 346pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997; the cover credit is interesting: it's a house photograph, "Untitled, 1982," copyrighted "Jerry N. Uelsmann"; now, there was a mysterious author, calling himself Jerry Yulsman, who wrote a rather good sf novel entitled *Elleander Morning* [1984], and we've heard it claimed that he is, or was, a photographer by profession – so, is this the same guy?) 6th October 1997.

Stasheff, Christopher. **A Wizard in Chaos**. "The Chronicles of the Rogue Wizard." Tor, ISBN 0-312-86032-3,

253pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the umpty-first in Stasheff's interminable science-fantasy series [from many publishers under many different sub-series titles] which began way-back-when with *The Warlock in Spite of Himself*.) December 1997.

Teller, Astro. **Exegesis**. Random House/Vintage, ISBN 0-375-70051-X, unpaginated [circa 220pp], trade paperback, \$11. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut novel, presented as mainstream, by a 26-year-old British-born American Ph.D. student who specializes in artificial intelligence; it looks like intriguing stuff, and it comes from a reputable publisher, but we can't help feeling suspicious of sf writers who feel the need to call themselves by names like "Astro" – memories of "Volsted Gridban" et al arise from

the bad old days; however, it turns out that this Astro Teller is the grandson of scientist Edward Teller.) Late entry: 7th August publication, received in September 1997.

Tem, Melanie. **Black River**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-2060-3, 376pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1997.) 16th October 1997.

Wagner, Martin. **Rachel's Machine**. Pinter & Martin [6 Effra Parade, London SW2 1PS], ISBN 0-9530964-0-8, 296pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new British writer: it's a small-press item, self-published really, but the "feel" of the book is fully professional; the author has previously written screenplays, including one, a horror-comedy called *The Writer*, which has been produced.) 6th October 1997.

## Spinoffery

*This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.*

D. Hoch, H. R. F. Keating are also in here, and there's a splendid new chronology of Holmes's life, by Ashley, and a detailed listing of other Holmes pastiches, etc; recommended.) 25th September 1997.

Ashley, Mike, ed. **Shakespearean Whodunnits**. "Murders and Mysteries based on Shakespeare's plays." Robinson, ISBN 1-85487-945-6, x+422pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Historical crime-fiction anthology, first edition; strictly speaking, this piece of Shakespeare spinoffery does not fall within our province, but it's well worth bringing to *Interzone* readers' attention since it contains original stories by, among others, Cherith Baldry, Paul Barnett ["John Grant"], Stephen Baxter, Molly Brown, Louise Cooper, Peter T. Garratt, Tom Holt, Patricia A. McKillip, Kim Newman, Darrell Schweitzer, Keith Taylor and Peter Tremayne – and it looks to be good fun; although he has been

format paperback, cover by Fannorn, £3.50. (Juvenile shared-world sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it follows books in the same series by Stephen Baxter and Stephen Bowkett.) October 1997.

Carey, Diane. **Ship of the Line**. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Pocket, ISBN 0-671-00924-9, 321pp, hardcover, cover by Keith Birdsong, £12.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is the American first edition with a British price added; a brief author's note states: "All chapter heading quotations ... are taken in appreciation from the works of Cecil Scott Forester, including the novel's title"; it looks to us as though the plot may be a lift from a Hornblower yarn, too.) October 1997.

Cornell, Paul, ed. **Licence Denied: Rumblyngs from the Doctor Who Underground**. Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0104-X, viii+206pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Anthology of fannish writings from small magazines associated with the *Doctor Who* sf TV series; first edition.) 16th October 1997.

at it sporadically for well over two decades, it's just in the past two or three years that Mike Ashley has emerged as perhaps the major anthologist at work in Britain: he's building up his own large stable of cross-genre writers, and it seems as if he may be aiming to become the UK equivalent of Martin H. Greenberg.) 25th September 1997.

Baker, Tom. **Who on Earth is Tom Baker?: An Autobiography**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-255834-3, xviii+268pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Autobiography of the actor who played *Doctor Who* in many 1970s episodes of the BBC TV sf series of that title; first edition; the publishers are touting this as a "hilarious, rumbustious and gloriously indiscreet" set of memoirs "to rival those of Peter Ustinov or David Niven" – high praise.) 6th October 1997.

Brown, Eric. **Untouchable**. "The Web." Orion/Dolphin, ISBN 1-85881-426-X, 103pp, A-

Cornell, Paul. **The Uninvited.** Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0220-8, 281pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf TV serial novelization, first edition; it's based on a script by Peter Bowker, from an "original idea" by Leslie Grantham.) 16th October 1997.

Genge, N. E. **The Unofficial Millennium Companion: The Covert Casebook of the Millennium Group, Volume One.** Century, ISBN 0-7126-7833-6, xiii+142pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Lightly illustrated companion to the horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first edition [?]; the cover gives the title as *Millennium: The Unofficial Companion*; the author is female and Canadian.) Late entry: 3rd July publication, received in September 1997.

Genge, N. E. **The Unofficial Millennium Companion: The Covert Casebook of the Millennium Group, Volume Two.** Century, ISBN 0-7126-7869-7, xiv+121pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Lightly illustrated companion to the horror TV series created by Chris Carter; first edition [?]; as with volume one, the cover gives the title as *Millennium: The Unofficial Companion*.) 4th September 1997.

Howarth, Chris, and Steve Lyons. **Red Dwarf Programme Guide.** "Second Revised Edition" [i.e. 3rd edition]. Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0103-1, 337pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Episode guide, with glossary, etc., to the BBC sf sitcom; previous editions appeared in 1993 and 1995; it contains 16 pages of black-and-white photographs.) 16th October 1997.

Howe, David J., Mark Stammers and Stephen James Walker. **Doctor Who: The Eighties.** Virgin, ISBN 0-7535-0128-7, 180pp, very large-format paperback, £14.99. (Copiously illustrated history of the *Doctor Who* television series in its last decade, the 1980s; first published in 1996.) 20th November 1997.

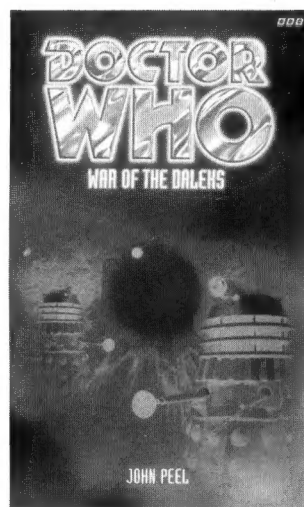
Joyce, Graham. **Spiderbite.** "The Web." Orion/Dolphin, ISBN 1-85881-425-1, 103pp,

A-format paperback, cover by Fangorn, £3.50. (Juvenile shared-world sf novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; it follows books in the same series by Stephen Baxter, Stephen Bowkett and Eric Brown.) October 1997.

Mortimore, Jim, with Allan Adams and Roger Clark. **Babylon 5 Security Manual.** Boxtree, ISBN 0-7522-2271-6, 160pp, very large-format paperback, £15.99. (Copiously illustrated companion to sf television series created by J. Michael Straczynski; first edition.) 19th September 1997.

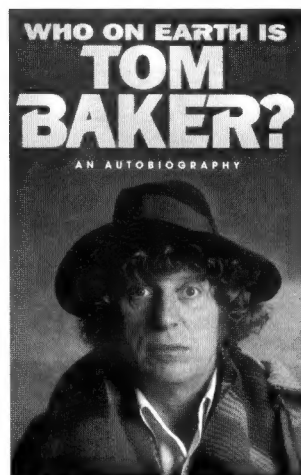
Nicholls, Stan. **The Awakening.** "Dark Skies." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50619-6, 300pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV series novelization, first published in the USA [?], 1997; it's based on four teleplays scripted in the main by series creators Bryce Zabel and Brent V. Friedman; Stan Nicholls's name does not appear on front cover or spine.) 9th October 1997.

Peel, John. **War of the Daleks.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40573-2, 277pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 6th October 1997.



Richards, Justin, and Andrew Martin. **Doctor Who: The Book of Lists.** BBC Books, 0-563-40569-4, 220pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Trivia book, based on the well-loved British sf TV series of the 1960s-1980s; first edition.) 6th October 1997.

Rogers, Dave, and S. J. Gillis. **The Rogers & Gillis Guide to ITC.** SJG Communications Services [PO Box 44, Shrewsbury, SY2 5WB], ISBN 0-9528441-2-5, 469pp plus a dozen unnumbered prelim pages, very large-format paperback, cover by Peter Wallbank, £19.99. (Guide to the various British TV series, many of them fantasy or sf,



produced by the Independent Television Corporation [i.e. Lew Grade's outfit] in the 1950s, 60s and 70s; first edition; series covered include *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *The Champions*, *Danger Man*, *Fireball XLS*, *Jason King*, *The Persuaders*, *The Protectors*, *Randall and Hopkirk (Deceased)*, *The Saint*, *Sapphire and Steel*, *Space: 1999*, *Thunderbirds*, *William Tell*, *UFO* and many more; like its predecessor volumes, *The Gillis Guide to Trek* and *The Gillis Guide to The Prisoner*, this has a simple black-and-white cover and may not at first look very attractive, but its large, double-columned, small-printed pages contain a great deal of information – much more than you'll find in any glossy, commercially-produced book from a major publisher; recommended.) No date shown: received in September 1997.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn. **The New Rebellion.** "Star Wars." Bantam, ISBN 0-553-50497-5, 532pp, A-format paperback, cover by Drew Struzan, £5.99. (Sf movie spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996.) 9th October 1997.

Russell, Gary. **Deadfall.** "The New Adventures." Virgin,

ISBN 0-426-20513-8, 264pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jon Sullivan, £4.99. (Shared-universe sf novel, featuring the spacefaring adventures of Bernice Summerfield [a former associate of Doctor Who's]; first edition.) 16th October 1997.

[Tolkien, J. R. R.] **Realms of Tolkien: Images of Middle-Earth.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-261-10345-8, unpaginated [about 140pp], very large-format paperback, cover by Ted Nasmith, £14.99. (Fantasy picture-book, first published in 1996; a follow-up to the similar *Tolkien's World: Paintings of Middle-Earth* [1992]; no editor is credited; each full-colour painting is accompanied by a short quotation from Tolkien; artists include Inger Edelfeldt, Stephen Hickman, John Howe, Michael Kaluta, Alan Lee and Ted Nasmith.) 6th October 1997.

Tucker, Mike, and Robert Perry. **Illegal Alien.** "Doctor Who." BBC Books, 0-563-40570-8, 279pp, A-format paperback, £4.99. (Sf TV-series spinoff novel, first edition; this one opens in World War II, when the Luftwaffe is pasting Britain.) 6th October 1997.

Waid, Mark, and Alex Ross, with Tod Klein. **Kingdom Come.** Titan, ISBN 1-85286-816-3, 232pp, large-format paperback, £9.99. (Fantasy graphic novel; first published in four parts by DC Comics in the USA, 1996; we rarely list graphic novels these days, as they are hard for us non-comics fans to parse, but this one is very striking and the publishers are touting it as the "heir to the throne" of the work which began the graphic-novel boom, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* [now more than a decade old]; this latest effort is a sort of updating of the old Justice League of America comics, featuring a very middle-aged, grey-haired Superman and a still-glamorous Wonder Woman; Captain Marvel is in there too, and Batman too; Alex Ross's photo-realistic style of painted comic-strip art – previously on display in *Martians* [1994] – is remarkable.) 10th October 1997.

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**HARM'S WAY** – "What if Charles Dickens had written a space opera?" (*Locus*) – large paperback, £3.50. *The Hour of the Thin Ox and Other Voices*, paperbacks, £1.50 each. Prices include postage. Colin Greenland, 98 Sturton St., Cambridge CB1 2QA

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## COMING NEXT MONTH

Guest editor Paul Brazier presents a stunning all-star Christmas issue, with new stories from Graham Joyce, Gwyneth Jones and Geoff Ryman, the long-overdue *Interzone* debuts of Colin Greenland and Pat Cadigan, and featuring an interview with Pat Cadigan. So keep a lookout for the "Christmas Special" January 1998 *Interzone*, number 127, on sale in time for Christmas.



# This month's news

## *Voyager* no limits

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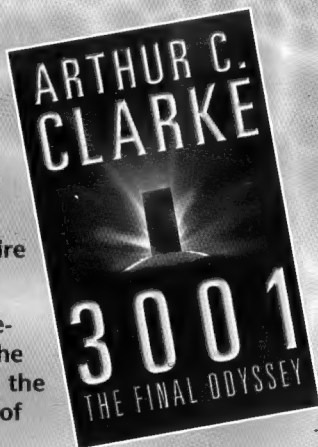
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Available 17 November £9.99 (trade paperback), £16.99 (hardback)

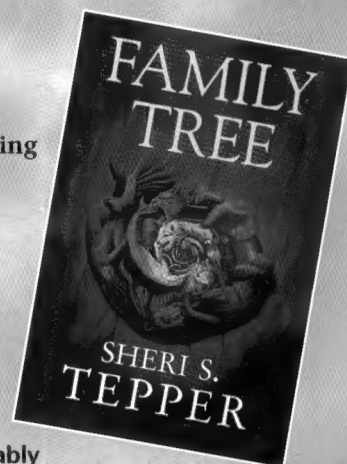
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